

Dear Friends

We celebrate Easter this year with deep gratitude to God for providing a shepherd for the Church in the person of Pope Francis! It has really been an eventful start to 2013 for the Church, with Pope Benedict's resignation and the election of history's first Latin American pontiff.

I felt heartened to see the extensive coverage on the papal elections by the global mass media. Both religious and secular news agencies produced a great deal of reporting over this period of time. There has been a broad interest in the Catholic Church all over the world surrounding the conclave and the first weeks of Pope Francis taking office.

Most of the responses to the goings-on in the Vatican have been positive, but there is also no shortage of criticism coming from those who have lost confidence in organised religion, or particularly, in Catholicism. Just scanning through any news agency's coverage - CNN for example - as well as the online comments that follow the articles will give us a sampling of polarised views.

My hope is that, when we read opinions or commentaries on the Church and its leadership, we will clearly distinguish between what is real and what is media perception. The latter tends to be powerfully shaped by the way news is reported and can lead us to make premature conclusions.

For example, we have been reading articles on how Pope Francis deals kindly with the disadvantaged. He is quickly being labeled

as "Pope of the Poor." However, we should not imply then that Pope Benedict was not as caring. Or we have read about how Pope Francis prefers to take the bus instead of the Vatican limousine, and personally calls the newspaper man to cancel his subscription. There he is typified as the affable "secretary-less pope." Conversely, it does not mean that Pope Benedict was less personable and one who made his staff perform mundane chores.

We can see how easy it is for one-dimensional portrayals to prompt us to imagine two popes who are very different, and even opposite. Such comparisons that are presented may also include - depending on who presents them - undertones about which pope they think is (or was) better. Giving these comparisons undue attention will not help us to appreciate the deep continuity between the one who will now lead the Catholic Church into the future, and the one who graciously gave way so that God's plan may keep unfolding.

We do well to remember St. Paul's advice to the Christian community of Corinth that was split between their loyalties to their favourite leaders: "I did the planting, Apollos did the watering, but God gave the growth. In this neither the planter nor the waterer counts for anything; only God who gives growth." (1 Cor 3:5-9)

Let's keep communion uppermost in mind as we enjoy this unprecedented moment in Church history. From SPI, a Blessed Easter in the Risen Lord to one and all!

Arthur

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A close-up photograph of Pope Francis, smiling and waving with his right hand. He is wearing his white papal attire, including a zucchetto and a pectoral cross. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in formal attire.

Habemus papam

A look at the life of Jorge Bergoglio

Amanda Yeo

What were you doing on February 11, 2013 when news spread that Pope Benedict XVI had submitted his less-than-a-month's notice to resign and his last day in office as Supreme Pontiff would be the 28th of February?

That was surprising enough for 2013, one would have thought. Benedict would be the first pope in recent centuries to resign. Catholics tried to wrap their minds around *sede vacante*, *papabili*, *extra omnes*, white smoke, conclave, cardinals, and the idea that we will soon have a new Pope while someone who used to be Pope is still well and alive.

Everyone seemed to have an opinion on which country the next pope should come from, from groups saying it is time for another Italian to be back in the office, to others who were hoping for the first African, Asian or American pope! As it turned out, on 13 March 2013, when the protodeacon Jean-Louis Cardinal Tauran appeared on the balcony of St Peter's Basilica, he announced not only that the conclave had

successfully elected a new pope, but also a name that was not predicted by media pundits in the previous weeks – Jorge Mario Cardinal Bergoglio who has taken the papal name Francis.

With that, the world was surprised yet again. For the first time in history, we have a Pope Francis! (Contrary to what one might think, that a Jesuit would naturally take the name Francis after St Francis Xavier, Pope Francis made it clear that it was after St Francis of Assisi that he picked the name.)

Not only that - he is the first ever Jesuit pope! Popes belonging to religious orders have not been common although we have seen Dominicans, Franciscans, Benedictines and even a Theatine (Pope Paul IV). But never in 265 popes have we ever had a Jesuit! For a Jesuit's perspective on how it feels like for someone in the order to be elected pope, read Fr. James Martin's article: <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2013/03/14/my-take-what-it-means-for-one-of-my-brothers-to-become-pope/>

Pope Francis is also the first non-European pope in modern times and the first from Latin America! Truly a lot of firsts!

So, who is Pope Francis? Only time will tell. But let us have a look at who Cardinal Bergoglio was as the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina. The Argentinian cardinal was not only the Archbishop of the Roman Catholics in his archdiocese but also the Ordinary for the Eastern-rite Catholic faithful in Argentina.



Bergoglio: bishop, cardinal, pope, commuter.

As Archbishop, he chose to stay in a simple apartment, cooked his own meals, and chose to take public transport. It is even reported that when he had to travel internationally, he would travel in economy class and when he was elevated to the cardinalate, he urged Argentinians to stay at home to pray for him rather than travel to Rome, and donate what they have raised for their trip to the poor. His sister and her family did not attend the Papal inauguration but watched it on television out of respect for Pope Francis' public request that money for air tickets to Rome can be better used serving the poor.

There are various other news stories speaking about how Cardinal Bergoglio kissed and washed the feet of HIV/AIDS victims when he visited a hospice in 2001, and other anecdotes including the young Jorge Bergoglio writing a love note to his childhood sweetheart saying that he would become a priest if he did not end up marrying her. The latest heart-warming sharing is from Cardinal

Timothy Dolan of New York in his interview following the conclusion of the conclave, on how the newly elected Pope Francis insisted on taking the mini-bus that he arrived at the Sistine Chapel in back to *Domus Sanctae Marthae* where the cardinals were being accommodated during the conclave. Also, Cardinal Dolan shared how Pope Francis put returning to *Domus Internationalis Paulus VI*, where he was staying before the conclave begun to pick up his luggage and settle his hotel bill, as an item on his immediate agenda – Pope Francis did exactly that the next day after he went to pray at St Mary Major, at the altar where the founder of the Society of Jesus, St Ignatius Loyola, celebrated his first Mass.

As for Pope Francis' curriculum vitae, he obtained a master's degree in Chemistry before joining the Society of Jesus. Subsequently he did studies in Philosophy and Theology. He then taught literature and psychology and had a stint as novice master, provincial, and as rector of a Philosophical and Theological Faculty. He also served as pastor of a parish, and completed his doctoral thesis in Germany. Cardinal Bergoglio was a member of various Curial Congregations, Pontifical Councils, and Commissions.

For two weeks, there has been a constant stream of information about the new pope. As the world watches for what the Holy Father does next, let us remember to pray for him as he had so humbly requested when he appeared on the balcony for the *Urbi et Orbi* – “first I ask a favour of you: before the Bishop blesses his people, I ask you to pray to the Lord that he will bless me: the prayer of the people asking the blessing for their Bishop. Let us make, in silence, this prayer: your prayer over me.”

Editor's note: We bid farewell to Amanda Yeo, who leaves the employ of the Pastoral Institute for Switzerland in order to pursue one of humankind's noblest and most challenging callings - marriage. May all of God's blessings go with her and her fiancé as they prepare for their new vocation together...somewhere in the Alps.



RCIA@Yishun Update

Clement Leong

This Easter of 2013 will be a special one for our parish of Our Lady Star of the Sea (OLSS) in Yishun. It will mark the first Easter that eight members of the Elect and one Christian candidate will be initiated into the Catholic faith through the ongoing RCIA process that we have been embarking on since 2011.

I remember the early stages when SPI proposed this mode of conducting the RCIA, and explored with us the pros and cons of this approach. It culminated in a memorable retreat for the OLSS RCIA community. This journey towards ongoing RCIA has been nothing short of a journey of faith - there were exhilarating challenges, assuring enlightenments, sharp critics, and strong defenders of this process - it has really been an adventure for me as the parish RCIA coordinator.

We were impressed many times by the ongoing initiation approach that manifested the spiritual essence of what it really means to make disciples of Jesus. And to think, this was already put out for us in the RCIA document since 1972!

In the beginning, I admit that our RCIA team did not feel any need to change from the previous RCIA model that had been handed down to us and practiced for ages. That model of RCIA was straightforward: the new 'batch' of inquirers came to opening night, and whizzed through the list of essential topics required of them to learn in order to get baptised and confirmed as a Catholic at the next designated Easter Vigil Mass.

The practical logic of that 'cohort' or class-based RCIA

was so compelling that Fr. JJ, our spiritual director, took a good two years to convince us to question our existing practices: Does our RCIA process allow different people who have different needs and timings to get ready for the Sacraments? Does it allow us, the stewards of the Sacraments, to minister to individuals in order for them to live out their baptismal vows?

Once we started to listen to these questions carefully and seriously, the answers were obvious: No. Our previous RCIA mode did not.

However, the ongoing model that was proposed opened up its own practical questions: a discernment based RCIA with no predetermined baptism date? Who, either inquirers or Catholic helpers, will join with no idea when their commitment ends? How to decide when catechumens would be ready for initiation? How to concurrently run the precatechumenate and catechumenate sessions continuously throughout the year? What kind of syllabus would fit this ongoing schedule? What about make-up sessions for catechumens? These were valid and practical concerns that fretted and stressed us, to a point when I even wondered: would this change actually collapse our RCIA team?

Under the 'cohort' mode of RCIA, we were already besieged by weekly demands arising from inquirers/ catechumens as well as Catholic helpers whom we rely on for sponsors, catechesis, logistics, and hospitality. RCIA work outstripped the number of labourers we had, we were feeling stretched by having our meetings on Tuesday evenings and the Breaking-of-

Word on Sundays. In particular, it was a challenge to identify sponsors for the catechumens, as we required prospective sponsors to attend an 8-hour training session. On top of that, with the ongoing process, we would need to inform the catechumens, helpers, and sponsors that there is no fixed end date to their RCIA involvement!

With God's grace, I am happy to report that now, two years since we dived into the ongoing RCIA model, everyone in the RCIA community seems to be enjoying and living the ministry way more than I had expected. Every Tuesday, we have a bustling community congregating to share God's works in our lives, to learn more about God's Word, the Church's tradition and to serve each other in joyful fellowship. We have two concurrent sessions, one serving catechumens and the other welcoming inquirers every Tuesday evening (and yet another separate session for the elect during the weeks of Lent!). We are worshipping together with our catechumens on Sundays; frequently celebrating the Rite of Acceptance at times throughout the year when inquirers are ready to make the transition. Sponsors and Catholic helpers spend a day each month in prayer and discernment of God's will for our ministry; and we are enjoying the wonder of Christian life with the catechumens at their respective Neighbourhood Christian Community



events. This model has also enabled us to welcome new inquirers that are walking in regularly every now and then. Gone are the days when the team had to agonise over the decision to tell prospective inquirers to come back at the next opening nine months later. I am amazed at the level of activity and energy that I find now within RCIA ministry.

Despite all the hustle and bustle, the fruit of the RCIA ministry - discovering God among us - remains the main reason why everyone inquirers, catechumens and Catholics have chosen to support this way of

journeying into the Catholic Church. The group of the elects and the candidate that we will be presenting at Easter 2013 are already well regarded by the RCIA community to be good disciples of Jesus and conscientious Catholics. They have earned our confidence through sharing the joys and struggles of their faith journey with us over the past years, despite the fact that they had committed themselves to a process with no defined end date. I'm sure they will continue their journey with the RCIA community after Easter as Neophytes for a year-long Mystagogy period. Yet, while the Neophytes are the visible products that the RCIA community is striving towards, I feel that it



is the presence of our generous Heavenly Father, made present in this process, that has bestowed the Catholics in OLSS RCIA community with a vigour that makes doing this work so enjoyable and meaningful.

Although the transition to the ongoing model has not been easy, nor it will be plain-sailing ahead for our parish RCIA community, the outcomes so far have been rewarding. Prayer, discernment, discussion and consistent communications have become part of the practice of the RCIA community. We have overcome and continue to manage assumptions and prejudices that come with RCIA work.

The 'cohort' RCIA was a well-ingrained mode that required a lot of work and conversion on our part. We had to shift from creating members of an organization, to creating whole-hearted disciples of Jesus who understand and can live out of their baptismal vows upon initiation into the Church.

I am personally grateful that we discerned and worked hard to follow Christ's prompting in adopting this ongoing RCIA process: we set out into the deep, we cast our net in doubtful waters, and despite our deep reservations reaped the catch of our lives.



Gerald Kong

My Journey of a Thousand Miles

The celebrated Chinese classical pianist Lang Lang wrote a popular autobiography, *Journey of a Thousand Miles*, to chronicle his awe-inspiring climb from poverty to trail-blazing success. His multi-faceted story is very much about an inner journey against the grain of the world and an infused desire to engage the world at large with the beauty of music.

My journey has been no less exciting and perilous. Listening to a voice that called from within, I left behind on the shores of Singapore family, friends, career, dreams and all things familiar to respond to the mystery of God's love. Moving away from Singapore occurred at a time when my peers were busy establishing themselves in their careers and on the way to starting families of their own. God had called me to a decidedly counter-cultural life.

More than a decade has gone past, and I have gained much more than what I had given up. While I renounced one kind of love, God has blessed me with varied outpouring of another kind of love. Discovering this new love has seen me through a considerable number of challenging years as I explored the possibility of missionary religious life, away from material comforts and earthly securities, abandoned to the mysterious will and plans of God.

From my days at Prudential designing financial plans advocating financially independent lives and selling insurance policies, I have moved to promoting eternal life as our surest security. Only God can effect such an amazing transformation from within me. Through prayer centred on God's word that brought me to experience Jesus personally, the scales of clamouring

for worldly success fell from my eyes like St. Paul's. I was led to see again where the true meaning of life is: communion with God and authentic love for all humanity.

The Philippines had been my home for more than a decade, and I have lived in and travelled to multiple destinations in the course of my study there. My greatest joy in the mission has been to see several Filipinos I have spiritually accompanied through the years mature in faith and zeal for evangelisation.

My area of study led me to profound missionary experiences in mainland China. Encountering the Church in China was one of the great blessings as a student in systematics at the Loyola School of Theology in Manila.

God has once again led me back to Singapore as a lay person to serve the local Church. I am newly tasked with the development of ecumenical and interreligious affairs, which I see as a key area of integral evangelisation in the Church. Although it is unfamiliar ground, I enter into this *areopagus* of mission with Easter joy and great expectation to engage the world with the music of God's love. For this, I ask for your prayers.

Gerald Kong joins the Singapore Pastoral Institute as Coordinator for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Affairs, and will partner the Archdiocesan IRED team in its work.
gerald@catholicspi.org

Embracing Humanity



Daphne Leong

I have always assumed that because I know Jesus' commandment to love my neighbour, I would also know the appropriate manner to love. This assumption was recently totally busted when I came face to face with a young mother. She had her own pragmatic values in raising her children that went against the norms of society as well as my own set of values. When confronted by her, my immediate reaction was to ignore her challenges of me and move on as she was not worth the time.

After that meeting, I asked myself why I had judged her based on my own emotional response to how she talked and carried herself. It was such an unexplainable reaction on my part that I could not even begin to say why I disliked her. Somehow I just wanted to turn and walk the other way.

Soon after that encounter, I had the opportunity to watch a movie that made me remember my experience with the young mother. This movie, 'Chocolat,' told the story of a single mother, Vianne, and her young daughter Anouk moving into a conservative village. Vianne's unconventional approach to life leads to conflicts with the traditional values held by the

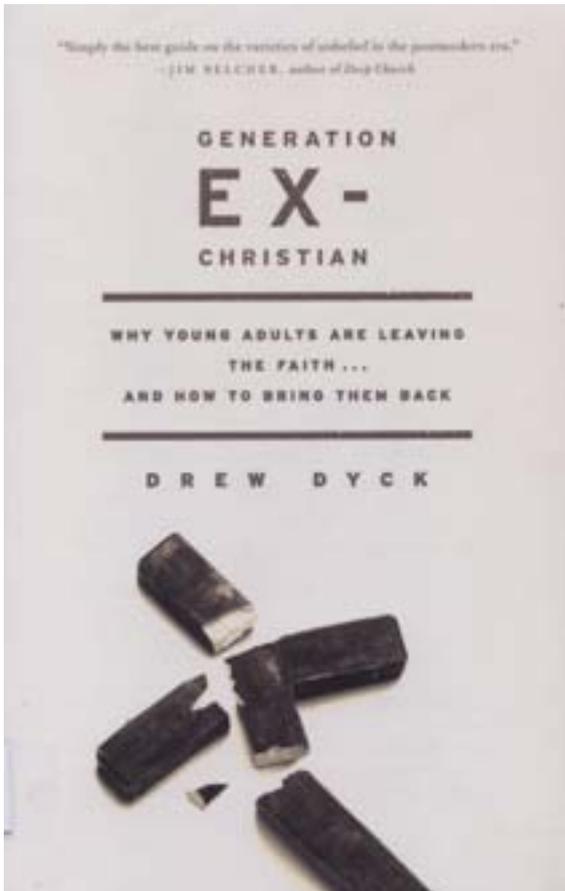
pious French Catholic village. Soon confrontations take place between Vianne and the more traditional members of the village, led by the Mayor. The story concludes on a happy note, with change of heart and friendships forged through the clash of values.

Reflecting on the movie, especially Vianne's way of befriending the townsfolk and knowing each person's brokenness intuitively, made me look back at my own encounter with the young mother and wonder if something similar had happened.

Vianne's ability to embrace each person was due to her own brokenness: being a child of mixed parentage that resulted in her leading a nomadic life as a single mother. Through coming to terms with her own weakness, Vianne recognises the brokenness of those who visit her shop who need healing. The people whom she embraces also realise that Vianne understands their plight and has something she can contribute to their recovery towards being a better person.

I saw that God calls us not just to empathise with others, but to recognise their brokenness too. This recognition invited people to open their hearts to Vianne and to receive some kind of healing eventually. Looking at my own experience, I now understand that my adverse reaction to the young mother was because I did not embrace her with my own brokenness, and instead I chose to stand apart and judge her. Perhaps if I had let the other party see that I too am a sinner making my journey here on earth, she would have been invited to walk along with me so that we can support each other on life's journey. I think it does not help that society tends to shun human brokenness and consider it weak. So, despite our being broken people, we hide this truth from others by presenting an appearance that is 'perfect' and 'good'. When we are confronted with others' wounds, we stand apart and say we are not like that.

Jesus became human to walk alongside our brokenness, and made us realise that he truly understands our pains. The Emmaus story gives me comfort that Jesus does not stand apart, but walks alongside me despite my own brokenness and sinfulness. I am called to attract others to share in this journey. I am grateful for this experience to help me embrace Easter with joyful hope, and this new season brings me to a new determination to learn how to walk alongside others instead of standing apart with judgement.



Title: **Generation Ex Christian: Why Young Adults are Leaving the Faith...and How to Bring them Back**

Author: **Drew Dyck**

Publisher: **Moody Publishers**

Pages: **198**

Call no.: **248.2DYC**

Amanda Yeo

Why is my child so distant from the church? Why are those Christians only speaking about Christianity and nothing else? How can I be a part of something that I am against? Why does it feel like what I'm saying is not getting through to them? When they are older, they will rediscover their faith.

If these or other similar thoughts have passed your mind at some point, Generation Ex-Christian would give you some insights. Drew Dyck, editorial manager of the ministry team at Christianity Today International, addresses the phenomenon of young people abandoning their faith. This book “is the first research-based book to thoroughly explain why [young people] are leaving” and “provides a hopeful remedy for what we can do about it” (Sean McDowell, General Editor of Apologetics for a New Generation).

In this book, Dyck shares his interviews with six types of people who leave their faith. He also offers practical ways we can reach out to these people.

Postmodern Leavers

These hold the view that each person has their own “truth” and this is found through their individual experiences. They are not completely irrational in their thought but separate logic and rationality from the realm of spirituality. They are not completely against religion but against the moral absolutism that some religions assert. Therefore, they are likely to consider themselves spiritual but not religious.

To get through to this group, using traditional apologetics will only drive them further away. Getting them to share their ideas and sharing religion through the way one lives out one’s discipleship is the best way to keep an open channel of communication with them.

Recoilers

They have become disillusioned with faith because they possibly have a painful experience with the church or someone acting in the name of the church – God becomes guilty by association. They will often have some intellectual reason for their choice to leave, but the true reason that is masked by the intellectual one is an emotional reason. Befriending them and allowing them to have a safe and trustworthy avenue to speak about their past experiences with the faith community

is a start to helping them reconcile with God and the church.

Modern Leavers

These are generally those who only believe in what can be proven by scientific investigation and reason. They have high regard for logic and reason and tend to enjoy a good debate on varying topics including God and religion.

When approaching this group, do not make too much assumption of common belief. Instead, ask questions and allow them to share their worldviews. Being equipped to handle popularly debated questions will also engage the fondness for discussion with this category of people.

Neo-Pagans

Dyck speaks particularly about Christians who have left the church and now practice Wicca in this section. This group has a strong emotional reaction towards the Christian faith because of how some Christians repeatedly portray Wiccans as Satan-worshippers and accuse them of sacrificing animals and spread rumours of them being baby murderers.

To reach neo-pagans, finding common ground in appreciation of nature is an appropriate way. Also, since neo-pagans are comfortable with spirituality, it would also be appropriate to talk about one's own Christian spirituality and spiritual experiences.

Rebels

This group cannot accept the divine authority of God. It is neither an intellectual nor emotional reason. For some in this category, it is simply wanting to lead the lifestyle promoted by the secular world and they find the church incompatible with them continuing the lifestyle they are used to. For others, it is a deeper, inner reason that they reject God's divinity.

Dyck admits that forming relationships with them is the best way to reach out to these rebels. Also, praying for them helps.

Drifters

This is the group that Dyck feels is the most challenging to reach out to. They are those who are lukewarm about their faith from the beginning with no strong roots. Being a part of the church or leaving is a gradual thing and when asked, they tend to still identify as Christian. To most, the church is nothing more than a social group.

For drifters, the right atmosphere and having strong inter-generational relationships seem to be the way to reach out to this group.

These are the different types of people categorised by Dyck who leave their faith. They leave for different reasons and he shares some of his insights on how best to reach out to the different types.

I found the book insightful, not that I would classify people into these categories, but in inviting me to examine my own approach when engaging people who are outside the church community. It helps me to recognise that there are many reasons people distance themselves from Christianity, and our responses will need to be measured according to those reasons. Perhaps this book would help you, too, as you try to reach out to family or friends who have left the church.



The Pastoral Institute was established in 1978 to assist the Archbishop in providing faith formation for the Catholic Archdiocese in Singapore. Today, the Institute continues to carry out this responsibility in the catechetical, biblical, and pastoral aspects of Christian ministry. In addition, the Institute looks to the preparation of those who serve the Church in various ministerial capacities, and identifies emerging issues that have pastoral import on the life of the local Church.

This newsletter is published monthly for internal circulation within the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Singapore.

Staff:

Director:	Arthur Goh
Director of Catechesis:	Fr. Erbin Fernandez
Pastoral Research & NCCs:	Daphne Leong
Ecumenism & Inter-Religious:	Gerald Kong
Rite of Christian Initiation:	Vacant
Pastoral Associate:	Clement Leong
Coordinator of Parish Catechesis:	Jane Lau
Asst Coord of Parish Catechesis:	Isabel Ho
Catechetical Admin:	Sylvia Stewart
Accounts:	Teresa Hoe
Library:	Angela Fernandez
Formation Courses:	Janice Ng
Reception & Biblical Liaison:	Melinda Reyes
Admin & Logistics:	Randy Seow
Address:	2 Highland Road, #02-02, Singapore 549102
Tel:	+65 68583011
Fax:	+65 68582011
Pastoral/Biblical:	admin@catholicspi.org
Catechetical:	catoffice@catholicspi.org
Web:	www.catholicspi.org

BCC/L2 - EVANGELISATION

This is the evangelisation module for Level 2 of the Basic Catechist Course. Organised and conducted by the Catechetical Office.

2 Weekends. Saturdays and Sundays, April 6-7, and 13-14. Saturdays 9:30am-12:30pm, Sundays 2:00pm-5:00pm. CAEC, 2 Highland Road. Contribution: \$60. Contact [Sylvia Stewart](#) for registration.

BCC/LI - LITURGY

For catechists helping children to enter into the Church's life of worship. Organised by the Catechetical Office with the Liturgy Commission.

4 Saturdays, April 20, 27, May 4, 11. 9:30am-12:30pm. CAEC, 2 Highland Road. Contribution: \$60. Contact [Sylvia Stewart](#) for registration.

VATICAN II: WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

Introduction to one of the foundational documents of the Second Vatican Council - the Constitution on the Church. Conducted by Arthur Goh.

4 Mondays, April 8, 15, 22, 29. Risen Christ Church, 91 Toa Payoh Central. Contact the parish for registration.

THE PERSONAL COMPASS MODULE 3

Christian Morality Today

This is the third module of a year-long six-module course to help participants understand the reasoning of Catholic moral theology. Audit students may register for any module as offered. Conducted by Fr. David Garcia OP.

Registration fees will be waived for members of the clergy and the religious.

6 Tuesday evenings, April 23, 30, May 7, 14, 21, 28. 7:30pm-9:30pm, CAEC, 2 Highland Road. Audit students: \$80.00 per module (Early registration by Apr 16: \$70.00). Contact [Janice Ng](#) for registration.