



MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE

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Date: 22 April 2023

Protocol No: CN/2023/001

OBITUARY NOTICE



**Bishop Emeritus
James Chan Soon Cheong, D.D.**

Born (Selama, Perak): 26 July 1926.

Ordained Priest: 9 August 1959

Ordained Bishop: 8 June 1973

Retired: 10 December 2001

Departed (Age 97): 22 April 2023

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Right Reverend Bishop Emeritus James Chan Soon Cheong (age 97), the first bishop of the Malacca Johore Diocese. Bishop James returned peacefully to the Lord at approximately 9:15 am on Saturday, 22 April 2023, at Graceville, MAJODI Centre, Jalan Masai, Plentong, Johor. He had been in good health right up till his demise.

James Chan, born on 26 July 1926 in Selama, Perak, the eldest of six siblings, was educated at St. Xavier's Institution, Penang. After the Second World War in 1941, he resumed his studies at St. George's Institution, Taiping, in September 1946 and graduated in December 1947.



Brought up in a God-fearing Catholic family, James found himself thinking about the priesthood during his secondary school days, inspired by Fr Noel Clement and Bro. Dennis, FSC. He was twenty-four years old when he entered the Minor Seminary in Singapore in 1950. He joined the Major Seminary in Penang three years later. He was thirty-three years old when he entered the priesthood for the Penang diocese on 9 August 1959.

Father James Chan served under Bishop Francis Chan and then Bishop Gregory Yong before joining the ranks of bishops himself. He was appointed as the first Bishop of Malacca Johore diocese by Pope Paul VI in December 1972. He received his Episcopal ordination from the Most Reverend Tan Sri Dominic Vendargon, the first archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, on 8 June 1973 and thus began the pastoral care of his flock of the then 25,000 Catholics in the states of Melaka and Johor.

Record of Ministry since Sacerdotal & Episcopal Ordination:

- 1954 - 1963 : Assistant Parish Priest of Church of Seven Sorrows, Penang.
- 1959 - 1972 : Director of Catholic Information Service.
- 1963 - 1964 : Administrator of St. Anne's Church, Bukit Mertajam.
- 1965 - 1966 : Assistant Parish Priest of St. Francis Xavier's Church, Penang.
- 1967 : Appointed Procurator to Bishop Francis Chan.
- 1968 : Appointed Secretary and Treasurer to Bishop Gregory Yong.
- 1970 : Appointed Parish Priest of Holy Spirit Church, Penang.
- 22-Dec-1972 : Nominated Bishop of Malacca Johore Diocese
- 8-June-1973 : Ordained Bishop in Johor Bahru.
- 1975 - 1994 : Secretary General of Catholic Bishops' Conference.
- 1975 - 2001 : Treasurer of Catholic Bishops' Conference.

Episcopal Chairman for the following:

Malaysian Catechetical Commission;

The National Commission for Social Communications;

The Ecumenical & Inter-religious Affairs;

The Commission for Charismatic Renewal.

Bishop James Chan was supportive of the renewal movement in the Peninsular Malaysia Church sparked by the Aggiornamento 1976. The idea of the renewal was sparked by the late Archbishop Dominic Vendargon, who had attended Vatican Council II (1962-1965). He was frustrated at the slow pace of change taking place even after many years of cursory study of Vatican II and its implications. At that time, Bishop James Chan had only been newly consecrated as Bishop of Malacca Johore. He had experienced a post-Vatican II Renewal programme at the EAPI and felt strongly that a renewal of the clergy and people had to start somewhere.

As a result of the one-month-long study and reflection during the Aggiornamento 1976, the building of the Basic Christian Communities was identified as the Core Need, while the four Related Needs were listed as Unity, Formation, Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue, and Integral Human Development.



Bishop James Chan built MAJOWE Centre, which officially opened on 23 August 1980. It has a home for the elderly, a day-care centre for children and even can accommodate hundreds of people for retreats and formations. The Centre continues to expand, and more facilities were added in 1991. Later it was renamed MAJODI Centre. The Centre is still a much sought-after place today for retreats and formation, even from Christian groups from Malaysia and Singapore.

During his tenure as Bishop, Bishop Emeritus James Chan oversaw the rebuilding of many churches, chapels and multi-purpose halls for parishes. The projects undertaken are as follows:

- 1982 – Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Johor Bahru.
- 1986 – Rebuilding of the Church of Christ the King, Kulai.
- 1987 – Multi-purpose Hall at St. Theresa’s Church, Melaka.
- 1988 – Rebuilding of St. Joseph’s Church, Plentong.
- 1989 – Church of the Holy Spirit, Jasin, Melaka.
- 1991 – Reconstruction of the Church of St. Elizabeth, Kota Tinggi.
- 1993 – Multi-purpose Hall at St. Andrews’s Church, Muar.
- 1994 – Multi-purpose Hall at St. Louis’ Church, Kluang.
- 1999 – Reconstruction of the Chapel at Bukit Batu.

Bishop James Chan also invited many religious congregations to start their houses in the diocese. In 1980, he approved and blessed the Monastic Centre, Ulu Tiram, founded by the late Fr Roberge, OSB.; Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Mary from Taiwan (CSCM, 1981), Good Shepherd Sisters (RGS, 1986), Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood (FMDM, 1987), Sisters of the Divine Saviour aka the Salvatorian Sisters (SDS, 1994), Franciscan Sisters of the Holy Infant Jesus from Taiwan (OSF, 1998) and the Society of Jesus aka the Jesuits (S.J., 1999).

In 1992, Bishop James Chan wrote a book about his life and spirituality, entitled *“When The Fruits Of The Rambutan Tree Are About To Ripen”*.

After his retirement in 2001, Bishop James Chan took up residence at GRACEVILLE. It is a Retirement Village which he built to care for retired Priests. Bishop James Chan himself was lovingly cared for by the nurses and caregivers until his demise. Many people and including priests, have commented that Bishop James Chan was a different person after his retirement. He was said to be an even warmer person, and this was visible by his greeting of *“I Love You”* to those he met.

Bishop James Chan was a vibrant and passionate pastor who genuinely loved the people he served. He may have been described as absent-minded, but no one will dispute that he was genuine. He was always available to those who wanted to meet him. Bishop James Chan visited his priests regularly, whether in Segamat or Melaka. More importantly, Bishop James Chan was always joyful in his service and made the people around him feel at ease. He truly lived his Episcopal motto: ***“To Serve is my Joy.”***



Details of the official wake and funeral are as follows:

The body will lie in state at the Divine Mercy Chapel in Sacred Heart Cathedral from today until after the 6 pm Mass on Sunday, 23 April 2023, where it will be transferred to the Cathedral.

- **Funeral Mass: Monday, 24 April 2023,
Sacred Heart Cathedral
1729 Jalan Keris, Taman Sri Tebrau, 80050 Johor Bahru, Johor, Malaysia
Time: 11:00 am
Presided by Bishop Bernard Paul**

(After Mass, the cortège will leave for burial at Ulu Tiram Catholic Cemetery, Johor)

His Lordship, Right Reverend Bernard Paul, the Bishop of Malacca Johore and the clergy of the Diocese mourn the passing of this diocese's first Bishop, extend their condolences and prayers to the family and relatives of Bishop Emeritus James Chan, and are united with all who are saddened by his loss with prayer and support.



Rev. Fr. Dr. Lawrence Ng
Chancellor
Malacca Johore Diocese