News
Spirituality
People stand outside the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd Dec. 5, 2021. (CNS photo/Christoph

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by Catholic News Service

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Catholics in Singapore are marking the close of yearlong celebrations of the 200th anniversary of church's presence in the city state with activities in a part of the city with historic Catholic roots.

The bicentenary celebrations, known as the Catholic200SG Festival, began Dec. 4 and end with concurrent Masses in all 32 Catholic churches in Singapore Dec. 11, said the Singapore Archdiocese.

On the festival's final day, Archbishop William Goh of Singapore will celebrate the main Mass in the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd, the oldest Catholic church in the country. The simultaneous ringing of the church bells across the island for one minute will mark the closing of the jubilee year.

UCA News reported the church arranged nearly 100 activities within the area known as the Mission District, home to three churches and the Catholic center. The activities are grouped into arts, community, and spirituality, with an aim to present what is like being a Catholic in Singapore.

"We wanted to bring the activities into this part of the city because this area is of great significance to us," said Father Valerian Cheong, co-chair of the Catholic200SG steering committee.

The Mission District is the very heart of the early but growing Catholic community that took root as Singapore began to flourish because of trade, he said. It was the area where various Chinese dialect groups, Indian- and European-language communities came to worship and help each other in difficult times. It was also the area where many Catholic schools had their founding, he added.

The Singapore church started the jubilee year Dec. 13, 2020, with a virtual Mass celebrated by Archbishop Goh. A jubilee website and a special jubilee logo were launched and a documentary on the social impact of the Catholic Church in Singapore was screened.

The theme for the jubilee year, "Ignite and Shine with Faith," focused on the pastoral vision of the Archdiocese of Singapore aiming to shape a more vibrant, evangelizing and missionary church.

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Events focused on renewing the faith of the Catholic community through four aspects: deepen, discern, witness and celebrate.

Archbishop Goh said the bicentennial was an opportunity to galvanize Catholics for the past, present and future.

"We want to celebrate with gratitude and thanksgiving how far we have come. We must empower our Catholics today to be vibrant in their faith and evangelize. And we should inspire all to work for a future when humanity and creation find completion in God," the prelate said.

Singapore was a Malay fishing village when it was founded by Sir Stamford Raffles, who made it a British colony in 1819. Soon afterward, Catholic missionaries arrived, and the Catholic Church is credited with vital contributions in nation-building through education, health care and social welfare.

St. Laurent Marie Joseph Imbert, a French priest of the Paris Foreign Mission Society, landed in Singapore in 1821 for missionary assignments to Malaysia and China.

He was martyred Sept. 21, 1839, in Korea, for refusing to reveal the whereabouts of other foreign missionaries during a time of Christian persecution in the country. He was canonized by St. John Paul II in Seoul in 1984.

The date of St. Laurent's arrival in Singapore is historically known as the beginning of the Catholic Church in Singapore.

Singapore is a multireligious and multiethnic nation with an estimated population of 5.6 million. Most Chinese are Buddhists and most Malays are Muslims. Christians make up about 15% of the population.

The Archdiocese of Singapore has 360,000 Catholics.