

## 'Anwar a brother to church, not politician'

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Deflecting claims that it carried out a "political activity," the Holy Family Church (HFC) in Kajang said today that it invited by-election candidate Anwar Ibrahim to its church last Sunday for the sake of inter-faith harmony and not to win him more voters.

HFC's parish priest George Harrison said the unusual initiative originated from a church member and he allowed it only because it was consistent with the church's mission to boost ties between Christians and Muslims in the country.

"I have been talking to people about building bridges with our Muslim brothers and sisters and so the event was allowed because a parishioner proposed it," he told *Malaysiakini*.

"It was not meant to back any political party," he added.

Harrison said the event, attended by some 1,200 people was organised by a church member from the Centre for Reform, Democracy and Social Initiatives, who rented a multi-purpose hall.

He added that although it took place after the Sunday church service, it was not in the main church building and the event was open to all.

At the event, Anwar spoke at length about the needed brotherhood among the various races and religions, quoting from both the Quran and the Bible.

Harrison said he, too, dropped by for the talk on Sunday but not to cheer on the PKR leader.

"I have told my people - that we must listen well to all and then make your own discernment and decision (on the by-election) - even BN's view and all.

"This is my message all along - I have said nothing to side anybody and to Anwar, I have only said : 'This is my brother, welcome,' " he added.

The 40-year old priest asserted that as a citizen, he, too, had a right to host a famous personality, and noted that it was the first time he and Anwar had met.

Asked to answer to Perkasa vice-president Zulkifli Noordin's **suggestion** that the church also allow Umno or NGOs like Perkasa or Isma to hold talks at the church after Sunday prayers, Harrison hesitated.

"If this happens now, it will be very political. Remember, I am not the one organising it," he said, adding that the church facilities were usually reserved only for its members to use for weddings and community events.

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