

## CATHOLIC WORLD LAST WEEK

(CWLW)

30 Jan-5 Feb 2023

30-1-23

### **Synod leaders seek bishops' support for preparatory process**

(30-1-23) The top organizers of the Synod on Synodality have written to the world's bishops, assuring them that the Synod has no hidden agenda, and asking their support for the preparatory process.

In their letter, Cardinals Mario Grech and Jean Claude Hollerich—who are the secretary-general and the relator of the Synod, respectively—tell the bishops that no themes will be "surreptitiously introduced" to the discussions at the worldwide Synod meeting in October by anyone seeking to "exploit the assembly and disregard the consultation of the People of God."

The primary reason for the lengthy process of consultation in preparation for the Synod, the two cardinals write, is to respond to "the great question challenging the Church since the Second Vatican Council: 'Church, what do you say of yourself?'"

Cardinals Grech and Hollerich remind the bishops that along with their responsibilities for their own dioceses, all bishops are expected to show "solicitude for the universal Church." In that context, they encourage the bishops to be full participants in the preparatory process. They go on to say that the Synod should help bishops in both respects: strengthening their own pastoral ministry and giving them an opportunity to have a voice in the overall direction of the universal Church.



### **Pope clarifies homosexuality and sin comments in note**

(30-1-23) In a recent AP interview, Pope Francis made comments on homosexuality.

Outreach, a Jesuit LGBTQ Catholic resource edited by Father James Martin, SJ, sought clarification from the Pope, who replied in a handwritten letter.

"When I said it is a sin, I was simply referring to Catholic moral teaching, which says that every sexual act outside of marriage is a sin," the Pope wrote in his reply to Father Martin. "Of course, one must also consider the circumstances, which may decrease or eliminate fault. As you can see, I was repeating something in general."

"I should have said 'It is a sin, as is any sexual act outside of marriage,'" the Pope continued. "This is to speak of 'the matter' of sin, but we know well that Catholic morality not only takes into consideration the matter, but also evaluates freedom and intention; and this, for every kind of sin."

### **Pope names new head for Dicastery for Bishops**

(30-1-23) Pope Francis has accepted the resignation of Cardinal Marc Ouellet as prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops, and named American-born Bishop Robert Prevost, to replace him.

Cardinal Ouellet has served since 2010 as head of the powerful dicastery, formerly known as the Congregation for Bishops, which organizes the appointments of new bishops throughout the world. In the formal announcement of his resignation, the Vatican press office noted that the Canadian cardinal had reached retirement age; in fact, at 78, he had reached that age three years ago.

Bishop Prevost, an Augustinian priest, has been serving since 2015 as Bishop of Chiclayo, Peru; he had previously served as a missionary in that country. From 2001 to 2013 he was superior general of the Augustinian order.

Bishop Prevost will take up his new responsibilities in April, and will assume the title of archbishop. He will also succeed Cardinal Ouellet as president of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America.

Last year a Canadian woman charged Cardinal Ouellet with sexual assault. The cardinal vigorously denied the charge, and has filed a lawsuit in Quebec, charging his accuser with defamation. Pope

Francis last year determined that “there are insufficient elements to open a canonical investigation” of the charges against the cardinal.

### **Reject careerism and seek fraternity, Pope asks Barcelona priests**

(30-1-23) On January 27, Pope Francis received priests engaged in youth pastoral ministry in the Archdiocese of Barcelona. The Pontiff’s address is presently available in Spanish and Italian.

### **Cardinal Parolin: Pope’s mission in DR Congo and South Sudan**

(30-1-23) On January 31, Pope Francis begins his apostolic journey to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan, two nations made fragile by horrific violence.

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Holy See’s Secretary of State, said that the apostolic journey “has two aspects: there is a pastoral aspect, of closeness to the local Churches and to these communities that are living, active communities, and then there is the socio-political aspect, and from this point of view, it is expected that the presence of the Holy Father, his word, his testimony, can help to promote the cessation of the ongoing violence and strengthen the ongoing processes of peace and reconciliation.”



### **‘Listening to the West’: Vatican hosts conference on synodality**

(30-1-23) The Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity and the General Secretariat of the Synod helped organize a recent conference, “Listening to the West – Synodality according to Anglicans, Lutherans, Reformed, Methodists and Old Catholics’ Traditions.”

Following the two conferences, “Listening to the East”, on synodality in the Orthodox Church and in the Oriental Orthodox Churches, the first conference “Listening to the West,” on synodality according to Anglicans, Lutherans, Reformed, Methodists and Old Catholics, was held at the Pontifical University of St Thomas Aquinas in Rome. The initiative, organized by the Institute of Ecumenical Studies of the Angelicum, took place under the patronage of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity and the General Secretariat of the Synod.

More than forty theologians and leaders of the different Christian Communions contributed to the event, which took place from 26-28 January in the presence of Catholic and Protestant professors of theology, as well as pastors from different denominations.

### **South Sudan rejects Pope’s advice on homosexuality ban**

(30-1-23) The government of South Sudan has rejected criticism by Pope Francis of his country’s ban on homosexuality.

“If he (Pope Francis) is coming here and he tells us that marriage of the same sex, homosexuality is legal, we will say No,” the government’s information minister, Michael Makuei Lueth, told a press conference. The Pontiff is due to visit South Sudan later this week.

“Our constitution is very clear and says marriage is between the opposite sex and any same-sex marriage is a crime, is a constitutional crime,” Lueth explained. In an AP interview last week, the Pope said that it is wrong to legislate against homosexuality, but he did not speak directly about bans on same-sex marriage.

### **New massacres in Congo as Pope prepares to visit**

(30-1-23) At least fifteen people were killed in guerrilla attacks on several villages in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo on June 29, just two days before Pope Francis embarked on a trip to the troubled African country.

The latest bloodshed occurred in Kivu province, bordering on Uganda and Rwanda. Pope Francis had originally been scheduled to visit Goma, the largest city in that region, but the escalation of fighting prompted organizers to drop that visit from the papal itinerary.

### **Jerusalem’s Christian leaders plead for peace as conflicts continue**

(30-1-23) The leaders of Christian churches in Jerusalem have joined in a public statement decrying the “proliferation of violence that has led to the unwarranted deaths of 32 Palestinians and 7 Israelis” in the past month.”

The Church leaders call for “robust intervention” by political officials and community leaders to break the cycle of violence.

### **Sri Lanka cardinal urges Catholics to fight for justice**

(30-1-23) “Once the Catholic Church functioned as a bishop-priest centered church and did only what the bishop or the priest would say,” said Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith of Colombo (Sri Lanka). “Today, we no longer need such sacristy Catholics. We need a laity who are ready to get down to the streets and fight for justice and do what is right for society. The Church needs Christians who will commit themselves for Christ and follow his example. We do not need spoon-fed babies.”

### **China - Three newly ordained deacons for the Diocese of Zhouzhi**

(30-1-23) On the day when the Catholic Church celebrates the liturgical memory of Saint Thomas Aquinas, great theologian and Doctor of the Church, the Catholics of the diocese of Zhouzhi, in the Chinese province of Shaanxi, experienced with joy and gratitude the ordination of three new deacons, who will soon be ordained priests and will be able to fully live their priestly vocation at the service of their brothers and sisters and the entire local population.

The ordination liturgy of the three new deacons, celebrated in the cathedral on Saturday January 28, was presided over by Martin Wu, Bishop of Zhouzhi, who was appointed by the Holy See in 2005 and officially installed at the head of the diocese ten years after his ordination. About fifty priests took part in the liturgical concelebration, as well as parents of newly ordained deacons and numerous seminarians, nuns and lay people from the surrounding dioceses.

Currently, 57 priests serve some 70,000 baptized people in Zhouzhi Diocese in 173 churches.

### **Brazil - Indigenous Yanomami: "the Church is always for the defense of life, land and the rights of peoples"**

(30-1-23) The Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon (CEAMA) and the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM), in union with the Church of Brazil, reaffirmed their commitment to be allies of the Amazonian peoples "to denounce attacks on the lives of indigenous communities, projects that affect the environment, the lack of demarcation of their territories, as well as the predatory and ecocidal economic model of development". In the January 28 pronouncement they confirm, "our response as a Church is the defense of life, land and the rights of peoples".



### **Pakistan Church leaders deplore Quran burning**

(30-1-23) Church leaders in Pakistan have supported Muslims in the country, condemning the burning of copies of the Quran in Sweden and the Netherlands.

Thousands of Muslims rallied in Pakistan following the Friday prayers on Jan. 27 to denounce the desecration of the Muslim Holy Book in three separate incidents by far-right European leaders.

At least 12,000 people protested in the city of Lahore alone shouting slogans as part of a nationwide protest against the desecration of the

Islamic holy book.

“We lament the desecration and burning of the Quran in Sweden, and demand its government to bring the culprit to justice,” said Father James Channan, director of the Dominican Peace Centre in Lahore.

The priest was addressing the Jan. 25 Interfaith Peace Conference in the capital Islamabad. At the meeting, Pakistan president Arif Alvi, urged the international community to take necessary measures

to prevent similar incidents in the future. Father Bonnie Mendes, the former regional coordinator of Caritas Asia, expressed sadness over the untoward incidents in Europe.

During the inter-religious meeting in Islamabad, president Alvi gave away shields to two Christian leaders as a mark of appreciation for their work to promote interfaith peace and harmony in Pakistan. The Christian leaders were Archbishop Christophe Zakhia El-Kassis, new papal ambassador to the United Arab Emirates, and Andrea Riccardi, founder of the Community of Sant'Egidio.

### **Christian leaders welcome Rahul Gandhi's India march**

(30-1-23) Rahul Gandhi, a senior leader of India's main opposition Congress party, completed a 4,000-kilometer journey on foot to promote unity against what he called an atmosphere of religious intolerance and hate spread across the country.

The march named Bharat Jodo Yatra (march to unite India) concluded in northernmost Srinagar city in Kashmir on Jan. 30, five months after it began in India's southern tip of Kanyakumari, winning the support of millions, including Christians.

"It is an important movement in the history of India," said Jesuit Father Cedric Prakash noting that the march passed through 14 states during which the party leaders personally interacted with ordinary people, trying to understand their problems and culture. "This is for the first time that people of India have seen such a march after the struggle for freedom" from the British colonial rulers, who left the country in 1947, the Jesuit priest, based in the western Indian state of Gujarat, said. The Yatra "has not only brought people of India together but also helped them disown the divisive elements such as hate, sectarian divide and other forces that weaken the country," he said. "Though the Yatra is ending today we need to build upon this spirit to ensure justice, liberty, harmony and peace," Father Prakash said.

Father Babu Joseph, Divine Word priest, based in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, said, "the enormous popular support he [Gandhi] has received from a cross-section of the Indian society goes to show that there is a deep abiding desire in the minds of ordinary citizens to reignite our hallowed heritage of social harmony."

### **Papal body to hold 3-days of prayer for Myanmar**

(30-1-23) United with Pope Francis' request for prayers after a recent hike in attacks on Christians and churches in military-ruled Myanmar, the papal foundation Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) is holding solidarity prayer meetings for Christians ahead of the two-year anniversary of the coup.

The worldwide three-day prayer started on Jan. 30 and will end on the anniversary itself, Feb. 1, of the coup which has caused thousands of deaths and massive displacement in the Buddhist-majority Southeast Asian nation.



### **Accused Indian cardinal gets bail in land sale case**

(30-1-23) Cardinal George Alencherry, head of the Eastern rite Syro-Malabar Church, has secured bail in a two-year-old court case in which he stands accused of illegally selling some plots of land of a southern Indian archdiocese, prompting renewed calls for him to resign.

The 77-year-old cardinal was granted bail on Jan. 27 when he appeared before a magistrate court close to his residence in Kochi in Kerala state, which is the headquarters of the Syro-Malabar Church — the second largest eastern church in communion with the Holy See. The case against the cardinal was registered following a complaint accusing the senior Church leader — who was elevated to the rank of cardinal in February 2012 — of illegally selling some lands of Ernakulam-Angamaly archdiocese, as its archbishop.

The Archdiocese Movement for Transparency (ATM), a body of priests and laity in the archdiocese, accuses the cardinal of selling several plots of lands undervalued, without proper consultation with

diocesan bodies, and without transparency. The deals have incurred an estimated loss of about US\$10 million for the archdiocese, ATM leaders claim.

31-1-23

### **Pope arrives in Congo to begin African visit**

(31-1-23) Pope Francis arrived in Kinshasa, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in the afternoon of January 31, beginning a five-day African voyage that will also take him to South Sudan. After a welcoming ceremony at the airport, the Pope met on Tuesday afternoon with President Felix Tshisekedi. Later he was scheduled to address a meeting of the nation's political leaders.

*(A detailed report of Pope's apostolic visit to DR Congo and South Sudan is given in attached file)*

### **Serve, receive, pass: papal remarks to Italian Volleyball Federation**

(31-1-23) On January 30, Pope Francis received members of the Italian Volleyball Federation and reflected on "the fundamental actions of your sport": serve, receiving, pass, attacking, and wall, which "makes us think of the walls present in various parts of the world, a sign of division and closure, of people's incapacity to engage in dialogue, of the presumption of those who think they can save themselves alone."

"Instead, in volleyball, when you form a wall, you jump high to face the dunk of the adversary: this gesture helps us to think of the word in a positive light," he added.

### **German bishops' president rebukes Pope Francis for criticism of Synodal Way**

(31-1-23) Bishop Georg Bätzing has criticized Pope Francis and dismissed the pope's recent words that the controversial German Synodal Way is unhelpful, damaging, and ideologically poisoned, saying the Germans had "fundamentally different views of synodality" than Rome. In an interview published Jan. 27, the president of Germany's Bishops' Conference said he considered the pope's "way of leading the Church by way of interviews" as "extremely questionable," reported CNA Deutsch, CNA's German-language news partner. Bishop Bätzing was referring to comments Pope Francis made about the Synodal Way, among other subjects, in a wide-ranging interview last week with the Associated Press.

Bätzing, the bishop of Limburg, noted that the German bishops had their ad limina visit with Pope Francis in November. "Why didn't the pope talk to us about this when we were with him in November?" Bishop Bätzing asked. "There would have been the opportunity, but he did not take the opportunity for discussion then."

Previously, Bishop Bätzing's co-president of the German Synodal Way accused the Vatican of "snubbing" German Catholics by raising "fundamental criticism" of the controversial process and resolutions at the November meetings.



### **Chinese 'underground' bishop detained again**

(31-1-23) Bishop Shao Zhumin of Wenzhou has been detained by Chinese authorities, along with Father Jiang Sunian, the chancellor of his diocese.

Bishop Shao, who is not recognized by the Beijing regime, has been taken into custody numerous times in the past several years, with authorities saying that he is engaged in tourism, and Catholics of the 'underground' Church reporting that he is subjected to "re-education" sessions. Usually he is held for 10-15 days and then released, although in 2017 he was in custody for seven months.

### **New document from the theological dialogue with the Oriental Orthodox churches**

(31-1-23) The Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches has published *The Sacraments in the Life of the Church*.

The Oriental Orthodox churches ceased to be in full communion with the Holy See following the

Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451). The joint commission previously published documents in 2009 and 2015.

### **UN refugee commissioner meets Pontiff**

(31-1-23) Pope Francis received Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, on January 30.

"Drawing inspiration and strength from Pope Francis on the eve of his departure to DR Congo and South Sudan," Grandi tweeted. "We spoke of cruel wars and the difficulty of peace, of solidarity and cooperation, of the 100 million refugees—and of not giving up. He surely does not."

(31-1-23) **\$5.4 million altar for World Youth Day generates controversy in Portugal** World Youth Day is scheduled to take place in Lisbon from August 1-6.

### **DR Congo - "In eastern Congo the situation is unbearable," says Fr. Luis Arcos, explaining why the Pope has given up on going there**

(31-1-23) "Why is the Pope not going to the east? Because it is an unbearable situation. There is a risk that they will throw a bomb and kill innocent people," says Father Luis Arcos, a White Father of Spanish nationality who has been a missionary in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo for 52 years. A visit to Goma of North Kivu state in the east was planned in the original schedule. The more than 100 different armed groups present in the province gave a problem even in the earlier planning. "And insecurity breeds poverty for many," stresses Fr. Luis, who sums up the situation with this image: "You can't leave your house after 6 p.m.; my Congolese confreres can't visit their parents who are 50 kilometers from Goma."

Keep in mind that Goma is an overcrowded city because of the people who have moved there from villages in North Kivu in search of a minimum of security. "Goma has seen its population grow from 300,000 to 1.5 million inhabitants in 30 years," the missionary reports. "They come from the interior areas of North Kivu to Goma because it is safer, but there are killings in its surroundings as well. The Nyiragongo volcano remains active

Father Luis stresses that at the heart of the drama of these lands is the struggle for control and exploitation of the immense mineral wealth of these regions. Referring to the ADF (Allied Democratic Forces), the armed group of Ugandan origin also known as the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP), he says "The problem is more political and economic than religious, because the Democratic Republic of Congo has coltan, a very important mineral for the development of the poorest countries. It's a huge mineral wealth, but who benefits from it?"

### **Cambodia - New students at the Catholic College, which deals with the integral formation of young people**

(31-1-23) The "Catholic Church Student Centre" in Phnom Penh, a college of the Cambodian Church, welcomed 18 new students, presented, January 30, at the opening ceremony of the new academic year. The college is under the aegis of the Cambodian Church's three ecclesiastical circumscriptions (the Apostolic Vicariate of Phnom Penh; the Apostolic Prefecture of Battambang; and the Apostolic Prefecture of Kompong Cham) and caters to the needs of male and female students, Christians and Buddhists - from poor families but willing to study - who could not continue their university studies without support. Students accepted into the institution - established in 1999 under the direction of Jesuit Father John Ashley Evans SJ - come from parishes across the country, which orient and introduce young Cambodians willing to embark on the pursuit of higher education.

The opening ceremony took place in the presence of Bishop Oliver Schmitthuesler, Apostolic Vicar of Phnom Penh and representative of the Council of Bishops, responsible for overseeing and guaranteeing the development and management of the project.



## **Indian govt against transfer of petitions on anti-conversion laws**

(31-1-23) The Indian federal government has objected to petitions challenging the anti-conversion laws enacted by states being moved to the Supreme Court for a uniform hearing.

Attorney General R. Venkataramani told a bench led by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud on Jan. 30 that the government has “serious objections” to transferring the 21 petitions pending in the high courts of six states. The laws are enacted by states, so, there is no need to transfer petitions challenging them to Supreme Court, attorney general argued.

Eleven Indian states have enacted anti-conversion laws aimed at curbing change of religion by individuals or groups through allurement, force, coercion or any other fraudulent means. Christian and Muslim leaders say these laws target their people and violate the religious freedom guaranteed in the Indian constitution according to which freedom is guaranteed in the constitution to profess, preach and propagate any religion of choice to all its citizens and that that these anti-conversion laws have a “chilling effect” on this fundamental right.

The petitioners in the Supreme Court wanted laws in five states – Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh – to be declared unconstitutional for disregarding the personal liberty of an individual to adopt another faith.

One of the petitioners, a Muslim organization named Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind and Citizens for Justice and Peace wanted all the state cases against the laws to be transferred to the Supreme Court. The National Federation of Women has filed a separate petition seeking to know the ill effects of anti-conversion laws on women.

*Gharwapsi*, a re-conversion drive carried out by Hindu groups seeking Christians and Muslims to embrace the Hindu religion, has gained momentum since the BJP-led government came to power in May 2014.

## **Over 60 dead in Pakistan mosque blast**

(31-1-23) Over 60 people, most of them police, were killed in a blast at a mosque inside a highly sensitive Pakistan police headquarters on Monday, prompting the government to put the country on high alert. The attack happened during afternoon worship in the provincial capital of Peshawar, close to former tribal areas along the Afghan border where militancy has been steadily rising.

The death toll continued to rise as more bodies were pulled from the debris, rising to 61 killed with more than 150 wounded.

According to BBC, as of Tuesday evening, 100 were confirmed dead in marathon search of rubble.



## **Videos to feature traditions of Japan’s ‘hidden Christians’**

(31-1-23) Descendants of Japanese Christians who endured persecution in the 17th to 19th centuries have launched an initiative to produce videos to showcase traditional Christian rites and rituals, which they say are forgotten due to declining followers and modernization.

The recordings will feature baptisms, Easter, and other rites in a traditional format that were followed by persecuted “hidden Christians” or *Kakure Kirishitans* during the Edo period (1603-1867) and until the last few decades, *The Yomiuri Shimbun* reported on Jan. 28.

## **Hong Kong lawmaker slams UK group for ‘political bias’**

(31-1-23) The president of Hong Kong’s pro-Beijing legislative council has accused a UK-based parliamentary association of “blatant political bias” after the group revoked the invites issued to the city’s lawmakers for a global seminar.

Andrew Leung, who leads Hong Kong’s Legislative Council stated that the move from the UK Executive Committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA UK) was an attempt to “derogate and sideline Hong Kong,” reported Hong Kong Free Press (HKFP) on Jan. 30.

1-2-23

### **Cardinal Zen hospitalized after Vatican trip**

(1-2-23) Cardinal Joseph Zen has been hospitalized with breathing difficulties.

The 91-year-old retired Bishop of Hong Kong, who remains a leading figure in the human-rights struggle, said that his health declined after he returned from a trip to Rome for the funeral of Pope Benedict XVI.

Cardinal Zen, who has been found guilty of failing to register a charity, still faces more serious charges under China's tough national-security law.

### **Anglican bishop charges synod member with hate speech for criticizing gender theory**

(1-2-23) The Anglican Bishop of Coventry has reported a member of the General Synod to police for hate speech because of his opposition to gender theory.

A faithful member of the Church of England's General Synod was reported by his bishop to the police for allegedly causing 'offence' over promoting a Biblical view of sex and gender.

The Bishop of Coventry capitulated to pressure from LGBT campaigners by reporting lay member of the Church of England's General Synod, Sam Margrave, to the police for an alleged 'hate crime' after Margrave campaigned online against Queer Theory and the sexualisation and grooming of children. It is believed to be the first time that such action has been taken against a general synod member for activity on their Twitter account.

Mr Margrave, a former councillor who has been a lay member on the CofE's governing body for over 10 years, has received death threats and faced constant harassment since he put forward a Private Members' Motion (PMM) for the July 2022 general synod entitled a: '*Declaration of Christian Incompatibility of Pride.*' Submitting the PMM, after receiving the most votes in the Coventry diocese for election to general synod, Mr Margrave's commitments involved a pledge to run a campaign "*against sexualisation of children.*"

### **Myanmar - Silent strike commemorates second anniversary of military coup**

(1-2-23) There is a ghostly silence in the cities, villages and countryside of Myanmar today (1-Feb 2023). Large parts of the civilian population, religious communities, associations, companies and ordinary citizens have joined the silent strike that the democratic forces of Myanmar called for on the second anniversary of the military coup on February 1, 2021. Two years ago, General Min Aung Hlaing and other members of the "State Administrative Council," as the military junta is officially known, seized power after overthrowing a democratically elected parliament over alleged irregularities in the November 2020 election.

The people's protests, which turned into a movement of civil disobedience and mass peaceful dissent, were suppressed and gradually turned into an armed opposition, from which emerged the "People's Defense Forces", which were formed in many cities and regions. "Conditions in the country have continued to deteriorate and have become terrible for countless innocent people in Myanmar," said Tom Andrews, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar.

According to the United Nations, at least 70,000 Burmese refugees have already fled the country.

Almost 3,000 people were killed in the military actions, including pro-democracy protesters.

Thousands are killed in army offensives against ethnic militias. Burmese forces burned around 50,000 houses across Myanmar as part of the crackdown on the insurgency. 13,680 people are still detained on political grounds.



### **Brazil - The situation of indigenous peoples arouses "holy indignation" in the hearts of all, especially Christians**



(1-2-23) The Brazilian Bishops' Conference (CNBB) asks the authorities for "adequate treatment dedicated to the Yanomami people and to all indigenous communities present in Brazilian territory. Given the seriousness of what is happening in the north of the country, the deaths, especially of children and the elderly, those responsible must be identified so that justice prevails. The genocide of the Yanomami is a chapter that will never be forgotten in the history of Brazil, that a similar crime against the lives of our brothers and sisters should not be repeated". The bishops point out that this situation should arouse "holy indignation" in the hearts of every person, especially Christians.



### **Indian Catholics demand strict action in Bible burning incident**

(1-2-23) Catholic bishops in southern India have deplored the burning of the Bible allegedly by a Muslim man who also uploaded video footage of it on social media. Kerala state police arrested the accused after the communally sensitive video footage went viral. "It is a deliberate attempt to create communal discord and he should be punished," Father Jacob G. Palakkappilly, the spokesperson of the Kerala Catholic Bishops Council told UCA

News on Feb. 1.

Father Palakkappilly appreciated the quick action by the police but demanded that the man be tried for attempting to disrupt peace. "This is a very heinous act," the priest said while pointing out that the same man had removed the statues of infant Jesus and others from a crib in a government hospital last Christmas. The man identified as Mohammed Mustafa, a resident of Kerala's Kasargod district, is seen in video footage burning a Malayalam language copy of the Bible. He is also heard saying that his act is in retaliation to the burning of a copy of the Quran in Sweden last month. A far-right Danish politician Rasmus Paludan reportedly committed the act outside the Turkish embassy in Stockholm. Enraged Muslims in many parts of the world staged protests against the act but those in India desisted from reacting in a similar manner.

### **Blasphemy charges stoke fear among Bangladeshi minority teachers**

(1-2-23) Blasphemy allegations against Hindu teachers in Bangladesh have prompted Church officials to conduct programmes to make teachers and students in Catholic-run institutions vigilant against increasing fanaticism in the Muslim-majority country.

Joyti F. Gomes, secretary of the Bangladesh Catholic Education Board, said religious minorities are concerned about emerging religious fundamentalism in Bangladesh. "When we have meetings with teachers, and management of Catholic-run schools, we make them aware of this religious fundamentalism, ask them to be aware," Gomes told UCA News.

According to the board, the Catholic Church runs a university, 15 colleges, and 580 primary or high schools having some 100,000 students, most of them Muslims.

### **Pakistan Christians slam religious ministry's seminar**

(1-2-23) The UN human rights body is reviewing the South Asian nation's track record in Geneva. Christian leaders in Pakistan have demanded the resignation of Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Mufti Abdul Shakoor for allegedly insulting them and their religious beliefs. Protest against the minister began after he invited a controversial figure, who is known for being involved in marrying off Christian and Hindu girls to Muslim men and forcibly converting them to Islam, for a seminar his ministry organized on Jan. 31.

Pir Abdul Haq, alias Mian Mithu, the man in question, was invited to a seminar on "Religious Conversions: Issues, Controversies and Reality" organized at a hotel in Islamabad. Christians of Islamabad present at the seminar raised slogans rejecting religious extremism, said a Christian

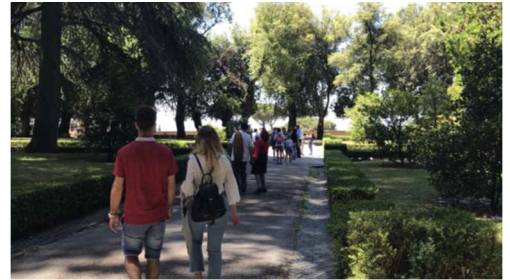
leader. They also boycotted the event after one of the speakers, a former Christian, rejected Jesus as the son of God and made false claims about the Bible, he said.

"A countrywide discussion on religious conversion has been initiated. A document of national narrative will be prepared with recommendations of all religions following a detailed review of such allegations," said a press release from the ministry. It said a joint declaration about the conversion issue in Pakistan "will be presented to the international community."

2-2-23

### **Pope launches "Borgo Laudato Si'" Project in Castel Gandolfo**

(2-2-23) Since the publication of his Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, on Care for Our Common Home in 2015, Pope Francis has insisted on the crucial importance of ecological education for an authentic "ecological conversion", defined as the "transformation of hearts and minds toward greater love of God, each other, and creation".



As a concrete contribution to this effort, the Holy Father has launched the "Borgo Laudato Si'" Project, an education centre on integral ecology hosted in the beautiful setting of the pontifical residence in Castel Gandolfo, 24 kilometers south of Rome.

A statement by the Vatican Governorate explains that the centre will be open to all people of good will and that "The activities and initiatives to be implemented in the coming months aim to combine training in integral ecology, circular and generative economy, and environmental sustainability".

The Pope has entrusted the implementation of the project to the *Laudato Si'* Centre for Higher Education, which he formally established with a Chirograph issued on 2 Feb. as "a scientific, educational and social organization, working for integral formation", with its own Statute.

### **Cardinal George Pell: Mourners and protesters clash at Sydney funeral**

(2-2-23) The Catholic Cardinal died of surgery complications last month aged 81. Formerly one of the Pope's top aides, he was Australia's top-ranked Catholic. But his public image was tainted by unproven allegations he both concealed and committed child sexual abuse.

Those allegations loomed large in Sydney on 2 Feb. At one point, police outside St Mary's Cathedral intervened to separate angry mourners from chanting protesters. Earlier, one protester was arrested.(BBC)

### **Church of England sheds light on 'shameful' slave trade ties**

(2-2-23) Three centuries ago, an enslaved person in Virginia wrote to a leader of the Church of England, begging to be released from "this cruel bondage." There was no reply from the church, which at the time was accumulating a tidy profit from the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

The handwritten letter from 1723 — whose author says they must remain anonymous for fear they will "swing upon the gallows tree" if exposed — has gone on display in London as part of efforts by the Anglican church to reckon with its historic complicity in slavery.

"It's a very poignant document, and also extraordinarily rare," Giles Mandelbrote, archivist at the church's Lambeth Palace Library, said Tuesday.

The letter is included in an exhibition at the library exploring the church's role in the 18th-century slave trade. It coincides with a new report setting out that role in hard facts and figures.

### **In Congo, activists look to Pope to boost forest protections**

(2-2-23) Local climate activists in Congo are hoping Pope Francis' visit will help spur action to protect the country's rainforest from oil and gas interests.

The Pope's call to protect Congo's "great green lungs of the world" on 31 Jan. was welcomed by campaigners who see the papal visit as a fresh opportunity to highlight threats to the country's

biodiversity and global climate goals. Parts of Congo's rainforest are up for oil and gas auction and several climate activist groups are petitioning the Pope to support their stance opposing fossil fuels investments.

The activists plan to present a petition calling for the cancellation of the oil blocks leases to the Pope, who is in Congo until Friday 3 Feb. "We appeal to Pope Francis to engage our government on this very crucial matter to call for the stop to these fossil fuel projects and the prioritization of renewable energy," said Congolese climate activist Bonaventure Bondo.

### **Stop blaming apartheid regime for South Africa's failures, bishops say**

(2-2-23) "We deplore the use by some political leaders of the legacy of apartheid as an excuse for their failure to do their job and deliver the necessary services," the Fides bishops said. Africa's apartheid regime of racial segregation ended in the early 1990s.

South

### **DR Congo - In the east of the country: rape as a weapon of war**

(2-2-23) "An action aimed at humiliating and killing a community through singular and sometimes systematic acts perpetrated in this or that village." Thus a report sent to, signed by Fr. Justin N kunzi, Director of the "Justice and Peace" Commission of the Archdiocese of Bukavu, capital of South Kivu, described since 2007 the instrumental use of sexual violence as a weapon of war with the aim of wiping out the local population as a community and persuading them to leave the areas where around 120 different armed groups in the three provinces in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

"Woman is considered first and foremost as a mother," the report emphasized. "She gives life. She is all that is sacred in African tradition. In such a context, violence against women is seen as a way to destroy an entire community. It is a way of striking at the very heart of the community."

First of February's meeting of Pope Francis with victims of the conflicts in eastern DRC affected by this strategy that can be called "cultural genocide" is a powerful reminder of this reality that must not be forgotten.

### **Bangladesh - Giving one's life to Christ to be happy. The testimony of five consecrated sisters**



(2-2-23) One gives one's life to Christ by following His promise of happiness. And following the steps of Jesus leads on unknown paths, where He never abandons us. This is what five sisters who grew up in a Catholic family (with seven children) in the parish of Doripara in Gazipur, near Dhaka, now all religious in different congregations, testify on the Day dedicated to consecrated life that the Church celebrates on February 2. In addition to them, their niece – the daughter of one of the two older brothers - also chose religious life. In memory of their parents, who died a few years ago, they tell of

a legacy they left them: "Loving God and neighbor is never a waste of time".

Their father was a flautist and mother a housewife and both parents were Catholics who "always put God first".

Sister Beena is now Superior General of her congregation and tells Fides: "Our mother was a pious woman and our father was a village chief. They raised us to trust in God. Without evening prayer we could not enjoy dinner. Our mother told us one day about the example of Saint Therese of Lisieux, whose four elder sisters, preceded or followed her in the choice of consecrated life".

Sister Beena reports that the five sisters today are sisters of different religious congregations but are very close: "We support each other. We also have a Facebook Messenger social network group that connects us to each other and helps us stay in touch".

Sister Beena says: "Family has given us the foundation to live a Christian life. Family is the soil on which a religious vocation can sprout. Today we visit families and meet other girls and share our testimonies. With baptism we become all called to holiness and to the proclamation of the Gospel".

"Today we are all happy and enjoying our consecrated life, keeping in our hearts the teachings of our parents, especially trust in God at all times, in our daily life," the five sisters explain.

### **Costa Rica - World Day of Consecrated Life: "Messengers of Solidarity and Hope in Today's World"**

(2-2-23) "In our current context in which we experience fragility, loneliness, inequality that leads to injustice, violence, neglect, uncertainty in the face of a bleak future, consecrated life feels called to respond by becoming a companion of the Church, by responding to Pope Francis' call to promote synodality, by becoming a companion of our society with the witness of solidarity and hope". On the Day of Consecrated Life, celebrated every year on February 2, the Feast of the Presentation in the Temple of the Lord, Bishop Bartolomé Buigues Oller of Alajuela, in his capacity as head of the Episcopal Commission for Consecrated Life in Costa Rica, speaks in a message to the religious of the country and to all the people of God.

### **Holy Land - Jerusalem, Shrine of the Flagellation desecrated**

(2-2-23) The series of attacks and intimidation that have been carried out in recent weeks against churches and Christian objects in the Old City of Jerusalem continues. On the morning of Thursday, February 2nd, a man - described by the Israeli media as an "American tourist" - broke into the Chapel of Condemnation on the Via Dolorosa and destroyed a statue of Jesus that had been placed there, first throwing it to the ground and then hitting it with a hammer. The man was immobilized and handed over to the Israeli police. Videos of his arrest, which have been circulating online, can be heard shouting that "there can be no idols in Jerusalem, which is the Holy City."

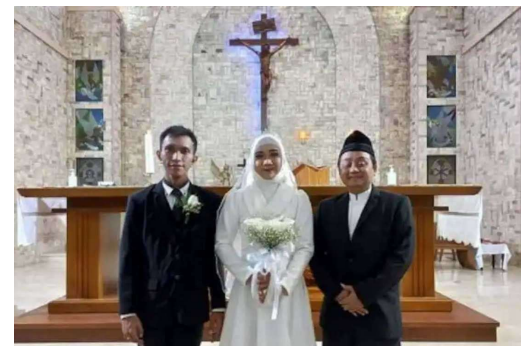
### **Indonesia upholds ban on interfaith marriage**

(2-2-23) Indonesia's Constitutional Court has upheld a nearly five-decade-old law that bans interfaith marriages, rejecting a Catholic man's petition seeking to marry his Muslim partner. In a verdict on Jan. 31, seven out of nine judges dismissed the lawsuit from Ramos Patege and defended the 1974 Marriage Act.

Patege's counsel argued that the law violates the constitutional rights of the couple, and infringes on their freedom to embrace a religion and belief of their choice.

Wahiduddin Adams, one of the judges, stated that a provision of the laws states that "a marriage is said to be valid if it is carried out according to the laws of each religion and belief" and so it does not impede anyone's freedom of religion and belief. "The regulatory provisions are about legal marriage according to religion and belief, not about the right to choose a religion and belief," he said.

He also claimed that the choice to embrace a religion and belief remains the right of each person to choose, adhere to, and believe in it.



### **Murdered Filipino's family rejects Kuwait 'blood money'**

(2-2-23) The family of a Filipino female migrant worker raped and murdered in Kuwait has rejected an offer of "blood money" from her employer, reports say.

The father of the slain worker, Jullebee Ranara, 35, confirmed on Jan. 31 that the family will not accept any amount for the killing allegedly committed by the employer's son, according to Filipino senator, Raffy Tulfo. "No amount of blood money can ever pay for my daughter's life. We will let the wheels of justice turn without accepting any settlement. A life for a life," Tulfo told reporters referring to Ranara's father's wishes.

Blood money is financial compensation paid by an offender (usually a murderer) or his family to the family of the victim. Ranara's body arrived in the Philippines on Jan. 27 following an autopsy

conducted in Kuwait. The report said that she was raped, beaten, run over, and burned allegedly by the 17-year-old son of her employer, who is reportedly in the custody of Kuwaiti authorities.

### **Sri Lanka Church to skip Independence extravagance**

(2-2-23) Church leaders in Sri Lanka have decided to shun the Independence Day celebrations of the government, citing economic woes and the breakdown of rule of law in the bankrupt island nation. An estimated US\$552,000 will be spent on celebrating its 75th Independence Day on Feb. 4, when a roadmap for the next 25 years is expected to be released before the bankrupt nation.

"It is a great crime and waste to hold an independence day ceremony when the country is economically bankrupt," said Father Cyril Gamini, spokesman of the Colombo Archdiocese. He said the entire Church in Sri Lanka, including its cardinal, bishops, priests, nuns and the laity, will not participate in the celebrations because the celebration is being "organized by shelling out a huge amount of money at a time of the foreign exchange crisis in the country."

### **Indian taxmen raid premises of evangelical pastors**

(2-2-23) Indian tax authorities conducted raids on premises linked to two evangelical pastors in the northern state of Punjab suspected to be involved in tax evasion and unaccounted foreign funds. Nearly 50 officials from the Income Tax Department reportedly came to the premises of Pastor Bajinder Singh of the Church of Glory and Wisdom and Pastor Harpreet Deol of the Open Door Church on Jan. 31 and seized currency notes, and documents related to banks and property deals. Local media reported that the pastors were running house churches and healing ministries – Singh in Tajpur village in Jalandhar district and Deol in Khojewala village in Kapurthala district –and have been receiving huge funding from foreign countries. Both the pastors operate from sprawling campuses and have several branches of their ministries with huge numbers of followers across India and abroad, the *Indian Express* reported.

The raids gain significance in wake of a series of protests and clashes between evangelical Christians and the radical Nihang Sikh community in Punjab last year.

Bishop Agnelo Rufino Gracias, the apostolic administrator of Jalandhar diocese told UCA News on Feb. 2 that the government is well within its right to take action if it suspects any irregularities, but "what is the motive behind this investigation is not known and we have to wait till the investigation team finishes its task."



### **Vietnam diocese buries 700 aborted fetuses**

(2-2-23) A diocesan pro-life panel in southern Vietnam celebrated a special requiem Mass and burial for 700 aborted fetuses on Jan. 29 where participants dedicated themselves to raising awareness of human dignity in the communist nation where students lead the pack in seeking abortions.

Led by Xuan Loc diocese's pro-life committee, the special Mass at Bac Hai Church in Bien Hoa City, in the southeast region of Vietnam, was attended by hundreds of pro-life volunteers from different faiths.

The cemetery is home to over 62,000 unborn babies. Before the burial, the dead fetuses were cleaned with alcohol, wrapped in white cloth, given names, decorated with flowers, and placed in the church for people to pray for.

"Burying dead fetuses is to apologize to unborn babies for the pain and suffering we make them endure ... and to pray for other babies to be safe," Father Joseph Nguyen Van Tich, one of two priests who concelebrated the Mass said.

### **Myanmar junta extends state of emergency**

(2-2-23) Myanmar's military authorities announced a six-month extension to a state of emergency on 1 Feb, effectively delaying elections the junta had pledged to hold by August, as they battle anti-coup fighters across the country.

The Southeast Asian country has been in turmoil since the army's power grab on 1 Feb 2021, and a subsequent crackdown on dissent has sparked fighting across swathes of the nation while tanking the economy.

3-2-23

### **Catholic leaders applaud Pope's call for 'hands off' Africa**

(3-2-23) Two influential African Catholic leaders say that when Pope Francis framed the continent's conflicts in terms of economic colonialism and Western exploitation rather than religion and ethnicity, he put his finger on a deep truth.

Johan Viljoen, Director of the Denis Hurley Peace Institute of the Southern Africa Bishops' Conference told *Crux* the pope's call in the Democratic Republic of Congo for "hands off" Africa's resources, was "the most relevant message possible for Africa today."

"In countries all over the continent, we are seeing the toxic cocktail of gas and mineral resources, combined with corrupt political elites and multinational corporations, resulting in 'armed conflicts' (where often previously there were none) to drive local communities off their land. This is being called 'the second scramble for Africa'," he told *Crux*.

The reference was to a period in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in which European powers competed to colonize the continent, a period known as the "scramble for Africa."

"Usually these conflicts are reported in the West as being religious or ethnic," Viljoen said. "The Holy Father has lucidly, clearly and in no uncertain terms, identified and exposed the true causes of conflict in Africa. It is the voice of prophecy, the voice of God."

He said the Pontiff's message "resonates around the continent. From Mali to Mozambique, from Burkina Faso to the Central African Republic, people are saying: 'That is exactly what is happening here, to us.' His message is particularly relevant, because since the beginning of the Ukraine war, Western governments have been desperate to secure oil and gas deals, disregarding human rights in the process."

Archbishop Stephen Brislin of Cape Town, the spokesperson for the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, said that "Africa is rich in resources and yet, by and large, remains poor and underdeveloped. Economic colonialism contributes to this inequity through the exploitation of those resources by foreign companies and countries with little benefit occurring to the local community."

The two men said multinational corporations in search of minerals, gas and oil, as well as the greed of the politically connected African elite, have become allies in bleeding the continent of its natural wealth. It's been worsened by Western governments, they said, who use their leverage to secure deals for the companies registered in their countries or serving their interests.

"Africa will never be able to extricate itself from this neo-colonialism unless Africans do it themselves, on their own terms," Viljoen said.

### **Pope arrives in South Sudan, beginning 2nd leg of African voyage**

(3-2-23) Pope Francis arrived in South Sudan in the mid-afternoon (local time) of February 3, beginning a long-awaited 3-day visit to the war-torn young nation.

The Pope had long hoped to visit South Sudan, to make an appeal for peace in a country that has been torn by fighting between rival factions since shortly after it won independence in 2011. In 2019 he had invited the political and religious leaders of the country to Rome for a spiritual retreat.

Thousands of people lined the streets from the airport to the capital city of Juba as the Pope's motorcade passed.

*(A detailed report of Pope's apostolic visit to DR Congo and South Sudan is given in attached file)*

### **Retired Italian bishop: Abortion is not murder before the 4th or 5th month of pregnancy**

(3-2-23) Bishop Luigi Bettazzi said that a fetus does not become a person until the fourth or fifth month of pregnancy. The 99-year-old bishop was Auxiliary Bishop of Bologna (1963-66) and Bishop of Ivrea (1966-99).

### **American tourist desecrates statue of Christ in Catholic church in Jerusalem**

(3-2-23) American tourist desecrates statue of Christ in Catholic church in Jerusalem. The vandalism took place at the Church of the Flagellation. As he was arrested, the tourist reportedly shouted, "You can't have idols in Jerusalem, this is the Holy City!"

### **Catholic priests in police custody in Russian-occupied Ukraine**

(3-2-23) Russian occupation authorities continue to violate freedom of religion and belief in the Ukrainian territory they currently control. On 16 November 2022 two Ukrainian Greek Catholic priests, Fr Ivan Levytsky and Fr Bohdan Heleta, and a Protestant pastor - the latest known religious leaders – were seized by occupation authorities, and it is unknown where they are or even if they are still alive. Raids on and seizures of places of worship continued in January 2023, and a purge of "extremist" books from educational libraries was ordered in Luhansk.

### **Japan - A petition to protect the lives and dignity of refugees and asylum seekers**

(3-2-23) The Commission for Refugees and Migrants of the Bishops' Conference of Japan has launched a collection of signatures to draw public and government attention to the possible tightening of the Immigration Control Law. Such a law, according to the commission, "oppresses refugees and endangers the lives of those who do not yet have residency status". The Commission, along with six other civil society organizations, had previously spoken out against the immigration law that Parliament had already rejected in 2021 and that the Japanese government wants to reintroduce in 2023. The statement, which calls for "a society in which the life and dignity of refugees and immigrants are protected", recalls that this measure "was withdrawn once two years ago because it is contrary to humanity".



### **Guatemala - "Migrant Houses" risk closure: Red Clamor supports Bishops' demands**

(3-2-23) The Red Clamor ecclesial network, which includes organizations involved in the field of migration, refugees and human trafficking, joins the Bishops' Conference of Guatemala, which expressed concern in the final message of the last Annual Plenary Assembly comments on the new state regulations that endanger the work of Church-run Migrant Houses. Specifically, the bishops are calling for a change in the provisions of Article 101 of Agreement No. 7-2019 of the National Migration Authority.

### **India - International Day of Human Fraternity: to wither away the politics of hatred**

(3-2-23) "The International Day of Human Fraternity that we celebrate today, February 4, is a call to be courageous in defending and promoting justice and the rights of all, so that we can truly live as brothers and sisters, in dignity, peace, equity and love in our Common Home", said Indian Jesuit Father Cedric Prakash SJ, recalling that the Day, called by the United Nations, was inspired by the Declaration on Human Fraternity signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar on February 4, 2019. "That fundamental document calls on believers around the world to engage in research and reflection in all schools, universities and educational institutions to help create new generations that will bring goodness and peace, and defend the rights of the oppressed and the least everywhere," the Jesuit recalls.

In line with such vision yesterday, February 3, the Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat of the

Society of Jesus, under the leadership of Secretary Father Xavier Jeyaraj, organized a global webinar titled "Fraternity@Frontiers" that launched an interactive global map of the Society of Jesus social centers, including those in the Indian subcontinent, active promoters of justice, peace and fraternity among communities of different religions.

Father Prakash notes: "We have welcomed the radical call to fraternity especially with those living in the peripheries of our dehumanized world. Pope Francis recently affirmed that fraternity means reaching out to others, respecting them and listening to them with an open heart. And he hoped that Christians will take concrete steps, together with believers of other religions and people of good will, to affirm that today is a time for fraternity, avoiding fueling clashes, divisions and closures. Let us pray and commit ourselves, today and every day in the future, that we may all live in peace in India in an atmosphere of harmony and fraternity".

The Jesuit recalls, then, that a year after the Abu Dhabi Declaration, on October 4, 2020 Pope Francis delivered his latest encyclical to the world on fraternity and social friendship, entitled "Fratelli Tutti": "It is a revolutionary text, which also highlights and challenges the fundamental teaching of all the world's major religions. Pope Francis makes an urgent and passionate call for authentic witness in today's world. He calls for dialogue among all people of good will and, in essence, provides clear direction to all women and men, regardless of their religious beliefs: "Fratelli Tutti" is the path we must travel together.

"Fratelli Tutti" provides a road map for all of us to become more fraternal in our actions, starting with recognizing the fundamental dignity of every person".

According to Father Prakash, that document can be "a Magna Carta, a way forward for all humanity and also for India today, provided there is the political will to ensure it, to overcome hatred, division and violence". At a time when, seeds of intolerance are felt and seen in Indian society, "fraternity," Father Prakash continues, "means recognizing and embracing every single human being, in peaceful coexistence. Fraternity," he recalls, "is also a non-negotiable dimension of the Indian Constitution that appears in its Preamble. It is a pillar of our democracy and refers to the sense of belonging to the country. The Preamble of the Indian Constitution declares that fraternity must ensure two things: the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation. From here we can start again today." "Today," the Jesuit concludes, "our common commitment, with India's Hindu and Muslim believers, is to defuse and wither away that politics of hatred that Pakistani-American writer Farahnaz Ispahani recently described so well in South Asia in her recent book 'Politics of Hate' (HarperCollins 2023 publisher) which analyzes religious extremism in the Indian subcontinent.

### **India's minorities get the raw deal in budget allocations**

(3-2-23) In the financial budget for 2023-2024, the minority communities of Christians and Muslims have received a raw deal from the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

When Muslims, the largest minority that makes up 14.2 percent of the nation's 1.4 billion people, needed a healing touch they got a budgetary shock in the form of a major cut to funds meant for their welfare. The presentation of this week's national budget was greeted with disappointment and cynicism by the nation's 170 million Muslims, accentuating the existing trust deficit between them and the ruling dispensation.

Christians, the second largest minority group comprising 23 million people, along with the others had expected increased budgetary allocations to continue the ongoing welfare schemes, notably the merit-cum-means scholarship for professional and technical courses meant for students.

Instead, they got the proverbial rude jolt in the form of a slash in the allocations for different welfare schemes, which they were least expecting.

### **US panel nominates Cardinal Zen, Jimmy Lai for Nobel**

(3-2-23) A parliamentary commission on China in the United States has nominated six pro-democracy campaigners of Hong Kong including outspoken Cardinal Joseph Zen and jailed Catholic media tycoon Jimmy Lai for the Nobel Peace Prize.



The US Congressional-Executive Commission on China announced the nomination in a press statement on Feb. 2, hailing the nominees as “ardent champions” of human rights and rule of law in the city. The other nominees are Tonyee Chow Hang, Gwyneth Ho Kwai-lam, Lee Cheuk-yan, and Joshua Wong.

### **Indian Church's liturgical dispute reaches court**

(3-2-23) The protracted liturgy dispute in India's Eastern rite Syro-Malabar Church has been dragged into a civil court after its Synod of Bishops and a Vatican-appointed administrator failed to settle a decades-old internal tussle.

A top court in the southern state of Kerala, where the Church is based, issued notices on Feb. 1 to Cardinal George Alencherry, the head of the Church, Archbishop Andrews Thazhath, the apostolic administrator of Ernakulam-Angamaly archdiocese, among others to present their case.

The Kerala High Court's intervention was sought by two parishioners through a petition. The petition sought to reopen a cathedral and restore their right to profess and practice their religion as enshrined in the Indian constitution. The petitioners, Tomy Joseph and Antony Joseph pleaded that their rights were being infringed upon since the St. Mary's Cathedral Basilica of the archdiocese was closed by the police on Dec. 24 last year following a violent clash between rival Catholics over the longstanding liturgy dispute. They further sought the court's intervention to reopen the Cathedral Church.

The court has directed the Church authorities to submit their replies to the petition and posted the case for hearing on Feb.6.

Experts and Church leaders say dragging the church dispute to a civil court will have serious consequences on the Church, including questions about its credibility and authority.



### **Vietnam Catholics hail initiative to save marriages**

(3-2-23) Some 2,000 people gathered to mark the 35th anniversary of the Marriage-Family Enrichment Program at the National Shrine of Our Lady of La Vang in the central Vietnamese province of Quang Tri. Four bishops and 30 priests were also present at the event organized on Jan 31-Feb 2 with the theme “walking with the church, couples love one another through humility and closeness.”

Jesuit Father Peter Chu Quang Minh started the program in the US in 1987 to teach Vietnamese refugees how to live as good Catholics, maintain traditional family values and build a

happy life in their new home.

Father Minh, 85, who had fled to the US in 1975, introduced the program in his home country for the first time in 2003. Archbishop Joseph Nguyen Chi Linh of Hue, who presided at the opening ceremony, said they gathered to show their great determination to build happy families based on Christian values and restore traditional values that are destroyed by consumerism, insensibility, selflessness and social evils.

### **Marian flower festival returns in the Philippines**

(3-2-23) The Panagbenga festival on Feb.1 in the hill city of Baguio in the northern Philippines thanks Virgin Mary for the past year's harvest with cultural shows that feature the history of the mountainous province of Benguet.

This time there was more enthusiasm as the event was being held after a three-year hiatus due to the Covid-19 pandemic. “We want to honor Mother Mary through our floats because of our prayers, we believed, she interceded for our people, especially when our farmers had difficulty selling their crops due to pandemic-related restrictions,” Carol Vivar, a Marian devotee in Baguio, told UCA News.

4-2-23

## **India: Anti conversion – Supreme Court seeks replies from 7 states**

(4-2-23) The Supreme Court sought on 3 Feb. responses from seven states on multiple petitions challenging the validity of Religious Freedom Act mandating permission from the authorities for converting from one religion to another, even for the purpose of marriage, reports Dhananjay Mahapatra. It also entertained a plea for transfer of similar petitions pending in various highcourts. These laws were enacted by Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Karnataka and Jharkhand ostensibly to curb conversions through allurements, deceit or marriage, the latter being referred to in quarters as 'love jihad.'

The petitioners had challenged in the respective state High Courts the provisions of these laws and had pleaded that their pleas should be shifted to the Supreme Court for a consolidated hearing to avoid duplicating adjudication. The Attorney General R.Venkataraman had opposed this plea saying: "The high Courts are well-suited to the validity of the laws enacted keeping in mind the circumstances peculiar to the state." (TOI 4 Feb adjudicate 2023)



## **South Sudan - "Knowing how to suffer for ". Pope exalts Daniele Comboni's missionary adventure in Africa**

(4-2-23) "I have only the good of the Church in my heart. And for the conversion of my African loved ones I would give a hundred lives if I could". This is what Daniele Comboni said of himself, revealing even with the strong expressions of his speech the volcanic and impetuous temperament. Because of his missionary passion, he recounted that he had to "Fight with potentates, Turks, atheists, freemasons, barbarians, elements, priests ... but all our trust is in him who chooses the weakest means to do his works". Today Pope Francis recalled the memory of the missionary saint in Saint Theresa's Cathedral in Juba, where he met bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated men and women and seminarians, on the second day of his apostolic journey to South Sudan. "We can remember," the Pope said at the end of his address, "Saint Daniele Comboni, who with his missionary brothers did a great work of evangelization in this land: he said that the missionary must be willing to do everything for Christ and for the Gospel, and that there is a need for bold and generous souls who know how to suffer and die for Africa".

## **India - International Day of Human Fraternity: to wither away the politics of hatred**

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