

## CATHOLIC WORLD LAST WEEK

(CWLW)

20-26 Feb 2023

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### Murder investigation underway into Los Angeles auxiliary bishop's death



(20-2-23) Auxiliary Bishop David O'Connell of Los Angeles, 69, was found dead in his home on February 18, the victim of a gunshot wound. Born in Ireland and ordained to the priesthood in 1979, he was appointed a Los Angeles auxiliary bishop in 2015. Police in Los Angeles have announced an arrest in connection with this murder. The suspect—who has not yet been identified—was taken into custody after a brief standoff with police in Torrance, California, not far from the bishop's residence.

Officials said that police when they were called to the bishop's residence late 18 Feb. Saturday night, they found Bishop O'Connell in his bed, dead of a single gunshot wound. There was no sign of forced entry, and neighbours reported no disturbance. No motive has been advanced for the killing.

(21-2-23) The man arrested by police in the shooting death of Bishop David O'Connell is the husband of the bishop's housekeeper, police have disclosed. The suspect, Carlos Medina, was arrested after a confrontation with police. He had reportedly told acquaintances that the bishop owed him money. His wife, the housekeeper, was said to be cooperating with the police.

### Local Catholic pastor lauds 'Asbury revival'

(20-2-23) A Catholic priest who has joined in the prayers of the "Asbury revival" in the USA believes that the extraordinary outburst of religious enthusiasm on the Kentucky college campus is "definitely of God, definitely of the Holy Spirit."

On February 8, a morning chapel service at little Asbury University—a Christian liberal-arts institution—prompted some students to remain in the chapel, singing and praying and bearing witness to their faith. The spontaneous extension of the prayer service continued, uninterrupted, for more than ten days, drawing thousands of people to the campus to join in the enthusiastic revival.

Father Norman Fischer, the pastor at a parish near the campus, reports that he has joined in the prayer sessions, and heard confessions of Catholics engaged in the revival.

### Philadelphia police find 18-inch pipe bomb behind Catholic church

(20-2-23) "Officials say a passerby found the pipe bomb, and noted it was a PVC pipe with capped ends and black powder on it," according to a local news report. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops has documented 248 acts of vandalism, arson, and other destruction at parishes and other Catholic sites in the United States since May 2020.

### Make technology serve humanity, Pope urges

(20-2-23) Pope Francis met on February 20 with members of the Pontifical Academy for Life, who are meeting this week to discuss the challenges raised by "converging technologies."

Because of the accelerating pace of advancement in artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and information exchange—"with effects and developments that are not always clear and predictable"—the Pontiff called for "a serious reflection on the very value of humanity." He urged an effort to make new technology serve the needs of humanity, with an understanding that "the whole is greater than the part."

### Pope encourages 'tenderness' in work with the poor

(20-2-23) Meeting on February 20 the members of the Circle of Saint Peter—a group dedicated to charitable works with the poor in Rome—Pope Francis encouraged them to show “tenderness” toward those they helped, as opposed to sentimentalism. He contrasted their approach with the “culture of indifference and the throwaway culture” around them.

### **Nigeria’s newest cardinal shares secret behind the highest Mass attendance in the world**

(14-2-23) After Nigeria was recognized as having the highest Mass attendance in the world, the African nation’s youngest cardinal has shared some of the secrets behind his country’s vibrant sacramental life.

A recent study found that 94% of Nigeria’s 30 million Catholics say they attend Mass at least weekly or more.

Cardinal Peter Ebere Okpaleke, 59, who leads the southern Nigerian diocese of Ekwulobia, sees three key factors behind the active participation of Catholics in Nigeria. In an interview with CNA when the cardinal was in Rome this month, Cardinal Okpaleke said that he believes Nigeria’s traditional worldview, the role of the family, and a sense of community within parishes have kept Nigerians close to the sacraments generation after generation.

Nigerian society as a whole has “a traditional worldview” that recognizes the presence of God in life and society, according to the cardinal. Nigerians have not lost sight of how the spiritual world imbues everyday life.

He noted that high Mass attendance “cuts across income brackets” with the poor and the rich, the uneducated and the educated all drawn to the sacraments by a shared desire for God.

In Nigeria, there is a strong sense that “the family is “the domestic church,”” a term used by early Church Fathers and emphasized by St. John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio*. The family is viewed as the primary place where the “faith is handed over to the next generation,” Cardinal Okpaleke said. The cardinal noted that while the family is “facing a lot of pressure because of the socioeconomic and cultural situation in Nigeria,” most families have held out against this pressure, drawing “from the faith to surmount the challenges thrown at them.”

Catholic parishes and dioceses in Nigeria provide people with a strong sense of “community and belongingness.” “Largely, people feel a sense of community in the Church,” the cardinal said. He has seen this firsthand in his own diocese, which is only 3 years old, where diocesan Synod on Synodality discussions felt like “traditional sessions in village squares where matters of interest to the community were discussed.”

Cardinal Okpaleke, who was made a cardinal by Pope Francis in 2022, underlined the important role of the family and of parish communities cultivating a living faith.



### **Tibetan church, an "oasis of coexistence" even for the Chinese state media**

(20-2-23) The China News Service (CNS) describes the Catholic community of Yanjing as an "oasis of coexistence" between religions and a "place of encounter" between cultures Catholic community in the Tibet Autonomous Region. The second largest news agency of the People's Republic of China, which disseminates news in Chinese and English, recently posted a detailed report on the "Tibetan community" online. The agency points out that the church building's architectural features also combine Tibetan and Gothic elements, representing a fusion of different cultural traditions. But above all, the details and news collected in the report convey a vivid and evocative image of the small church community that profess faith in Jesus on the Roof of the world, where even Christian liturgical celebrations become an occasion for fraternal coexistence with fellow countrymen, the majority of whom are Buddhists.

### **Philippines - Walking, together, for the protection of life**

(20-2-23) Walking and praying side by side, religious, laity, priests, bishops for the protection and dignity of life, from birth to natural death, for the promotion of the family, for the defence of every

abused or discarded life: from the child in the womb, to street children who are victims of abuse, to women victims of trafficking and violence, to destitute families, to the discarded elderly. With this spirit, the Filipino faithful held again, after suspension due to the pandemic, the annual gathering dubbed "Walk for Life" on February 18, 2023, organized by the Council of the Laity of the Philippines, in collaboration with the Commission for the Laity in the Bishops' Conference of the Philippines. This year's theme was: "Synodality, Accompaniment and Closeness."

### **Indonesian cardinal wants Catholics fight trafficking during Lent**

(20-2-23) Indonesian Cardinal Ignatius Suharyo Hardjoatmodjo has called on Catholics to fight the scourge of human trafficking during the upcoming Season of Lent.

Cardinal Hardjoatmodjo termed human trafficking as "one of the greatest crimes against humanity, which directly contradicts the ideals of the common good" in a pastoral letter issued ahead of Lent that begins on Feb. 22.



### **Singapore Catholic editors win US literary award**

(20-2-23) Two Singapore-based Catholic editors clinched the top award for the second consecutive year from a US-based group that honours the best titles written and published with a Christian worldview. The e-anthology, *The Jesuit: Finding God in All Things*, bagged the Gold Award at the 2023 Illumination Christian Book Awards under the category of Digital Media, says a Feb. 18 press release by the editors.

Desmond Francis Xavier Kon Zhicheng-Mingdé and Eric Francis

Tinsay Valles edited the book exclusively composed to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the canonization of St. Francis Xavier and St. Ignatius of Loyola in 2022. The 250-page book features articles from 21 eminent authors from around the world.

The writer-editor duo won the Gold Award for another e-anthology, *A Given Grace: An Anthology of Christian Poems*, last year by the Michigan-based organization. The book commemorates five centuries of Catholicism in the Philippines and 200 years of Catholicism in Singapore in 2021.

### **Priest slams slow pace of Philippine justice for slain confrere**

(20-2-23) An Italian missionary priest in the Philippines has strongly criticized the country's legal system over what he calls the very slow pace in bringing to justice the killers of a confrere murdered 11 years ago.

Father Peter Geremia, 84, a member of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME) said on Feb. 17 that the murder case of his fellow missionary Father Fausto Tentorio has made no notable progress due to legal technicalities.

Father Geremia, is now spending retired life in Kidapawan city in Cotabato province in the Mindanao region of southern Philippines after having served in the country since 1972. "Delay is not new to the case ... it was from the beginning. At first, there was no formal case filed after the death of Father Tentorio in 2011 because of the investigation by the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI)," Father Geremia told UCA News. The priest said state prosecutors first thought the case was weak, but later they were convinced and moved it to the regional court for a full-blown trial.

Father Tentorio, also known as "Fr. Pops" was gunned down on Oct. 17, 2011, inside the Mother of Perpetual Help Church compound in Arakan of Cotabato province. Police arrested only one of seven suspects for the murder in 2022, the other six are still at large.

### **Indian archdiocese alleges minorities cut from voter list**

(20-2-23) Several thousand voters belonging to religious minorities such as Christians and Muslims have been allegedly removed from electoral rolls in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, say Catholic leaders.

The state, where the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) runs the government, is headed for polls in May and Christian leaders suspect deleting minority voters could be a strategy to retain power. A delegation from Bangalore archdiocese on Feb. 15 submitted a memorandum to the state's chief electoral officer (CEO) saying a total of 9,195 voters' names were removed from electoral rolls of the Shivajinagar constituency in the state capital, Bengaluru. At least Some 8,000 names were of Christians and Muslims, the memorandum said.



“We fear that [voters lists for] many constituencies across Bengaluru city could have tampered with impunity. If such mischief is allowed to carry on unchecked, the confidence of the people in the electoral process will be destroyed beyond measure,” J. A. Kanthraj, public relations officer of the Archdiocese of Bangalore, told UCA News. He said it appeared to be clear manipulation to prevent Christians and Muslims from casting their votes in the upcoming elections.

Repeated attempts by UCA News to reach the CEO did not elicit any response but Following Chief Election Officer's suggestion, the archdiocese has undertaken a campaign across parishes in Bengaluru so that people can find out if their names were deleted from the electoral rolls, Kanthraj said.

### **Indian Christians unite to protest against hate crimes**

(20-2-23) Thousands of Christians, representing nearly 79 denominations, staged a protest march in India's capital on Feb. 19 against a growing number of hate crimes against them.

More than 2,000 Christians demanded, through memoranda, the federal government, judiciary and civil society take action to stop atrocities against them, with particular concern for those in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Karnataka and Jharkhand. Most of these states, ruled by the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party, have enacted sweeping anti-conversion laws.

“Our prime minister speaks of '*sabka saath, sabka vikas*' [collective efforts for inclusive growth], but what is happening to the Christian community in the country?..., the rising incidence of violence against Christians is an unhappy situation,” Sister Anastasia Gill, a former member of the provincial state of Delhi's minority commission, told UCA News. We are here to attract the attention of various stakeholders like the government, the Supreme Court and civil society to our plight, the nun said. Michael William, president of the United Christian Forum (UCF), a New Delhi-based human rights group, told the gathering: “We share the anguish of our fellow citizens whose fundamental rights are being snatched.” According to the United Christian Forum (UCF), a New Delhi-based human rights group,, 598 incidents of hate crimes, including intimidation, mob attacks, brutal assaults, vandalism and closure of churches, sexual violence, social ostracization, denial of burial, and false reports under the draconian anti-conversion laws took place in 2022.

However, the annual report by the Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations of North America (FIACONA), released on Jan. 30, claimed a much higher number of 1,198 hate crimes in 2022, an astronomical 157 percent growth compared with 2021. Human rights activists allege that non-tribal Christians are targeted by the fringe elements from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Minakshi Singh, general secretary of Unity in Compassion, a charity organization based in Uttar Pradesh, the state where the highest number of attacks on Christians occurred and where the anti-conversion law is in force, said “through the memoranda we want to ensure the constitutional right to religious freedom for religious minorities.”

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### **Nicaraguan government strips bishop, priest of citizenship**

(21-2-23) The government of Nicaragua has stripped 94 people of their citizenship, including Bishop Silvio Jose Baez, an auxiliary of the Managua archdiocese; and Father Uriel Vallejos, a priest of Matagalpa.

The Ortega regime had already revoked the citizenship of Matagalpa's Bishop Rolando Alvarez, as well as six priests and seminarians who were exiled earlier this month. Bishop Alvarez, who refused to accept deportation to the US, has been sentenced to 26 years in prison.

The Nicaraguan regime said that all those deprived of citizenship were enemies of the state.

### **Vatican volumes record Jewish pleas for help during World War II**

(21-2-23) The Vatican has completed a set of 170 volumes that record the pleas for help sent to Pope Pius XII during the World War II era, by Jews threatened seeking to escape from the Nazi campaign of genocide.

### **New Vatican document tightens controls on traditional Latin Mass**

(21-2-23) Pope Francis has issued a rescript formally confirming restrictions that the Dicastery for Divine Worship had already placed on the celebration of the traditional Latin Mass.

The rescript, issued February 21, says that a parish church cannot be used for the traditional liturgy, nor can a newly ordained priest celebrate that liturgy, without permission from the Dicastery for Divine Worship.

In December, Cardinal Arthur Roche, the prefect of that dicastery, had written to an American bishop, saying that a diocesan bishop did not have the authority to grant dispensations from the terms of *Traditionis Custodes*, the document in which Pope Francis had limited the use of the traditional liturgy. The February 21 document explicitly states that "bishops are not to invoke canon 87" to grant dispensations. And the effect of the document is retroactive: "Should a diocesan bishop have granted dispensations... he is obliged to inform the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, which will assess the individual cases."

### **Ukraine's Catholic leader says Biden visit generated new hope**

(21-2-23) Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, the head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, welcomed a surprise visit to Ukraine by President Joe Biden. "The Russian army has literally sentenced us to death," the Major Archbishop said, but visits from heads of state offer "hope that this sentence will not be carried out."

Other Ukrainian Catholic leaders also welcomed President Biden's visit, during which the president met the head of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.



### **Priest wounded in land-mine blast facing more surgery**

(21-2-23) Father Norberto Pozzi, a missionary priest who was seriously injured in a land-mine explosion in the Central African Republic, is being flown to Italy for emergency medical care.

Doctors in Kampala, Uganda, had amputated the priest's left foot. But as Father Pozzi's condition did not improve, he is being transported to Bologna, where further amputation is expected.

### **Pope reflects on relation between canon law, evangelization**

(21-2-23) In a February 18 address to participants in a formation course organized by the Roman Rota, Pope Francis said that "your work deals with rules, processes and sanctions, but you must never lose sight of rights, putting people, who are the subjects and objects of law, at the center of your work."

"These rights are not arbitrary claims, but objective goods, aimed at salvation, to be recognized and protected, without forgetting respect for natural goods within the ecclesial community," the Pope

continued. "You, as legal scholars, have a special responsibility to make the truth of justice shine in the life of particular churches: this task is a major contribution to evangelization."

### **One-fourth of Anglican primates reject leadership of Archbishop of Canterbury over same-sex blessings**

(21-2-23) Following the Church of England's decision to bless homosexual unions, the Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches has issued a statement rejecting the leadership of Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury as first among equals in the Anglican Communion.

The statement was signed by the leaders of ten of the 42 provinces of the Anglican Communion: the primates of South Sudan, Chile, the Indian Ocean, Congo, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Uganda, Sudan, Alexandria (Egypt), and Melanesia. The statement was also signed by the primates of the Anglican Church in North America and the Anglican Church in Brazil, which are part of the Global South Fellowship but not part of the Anglican Communion.

As the Church of England has departed from the historic faith passed down from the Apostles by this innovation in the liturgies of the Church and her pastoral practice, she has disqualified herself from leading the Communion as the historic "Mother" Church.

### **Middle East - Lent. Catholic Patriarchs open the time of the "Great Fast" under the sign of the Fathers of the Church**

(21-2-23) The Eastern Churches begin the penitential season of Lent while earthquakes, poverty, conflicts and political crises continue to sow pain and anguish in the region. The Patriarchs of the Eastern Catholic Churches have opened the time of the "great fast" with long and intense pastoral letters in which they have resorted to the writings of the Fathers and the great Eastern theologians to propose how to live the forty days prior to the passion, death and resurrection of Christ the Redeemer. In this way, thanks to their grateful memory of the spiritual patrimony of their Churches, the authors of the Letters did not offer empty neo-conformist slogans and puns, but useful contributions to live the Lenten season as a propitious time to wait for the Easter encounter with Jesus, finding comfort even in the midst of the new tribulations that torment the peoples of the Middle East.

All the Heads of the Churches of the East have reiterated in their letters that fasting, prayer, penance and works of charity are the practices that have always characterized the Lenten season lived in faith in Christ. Iraqi Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako, Patriarch of the Chaldean Church, says: "Prayer is not a theological research, but focuses on who we are waiting for", and "it is a pity that the practice of penance is currently in crisis, due to ignorance and unconsciousness of the Sin. Repentance and confession of our sins", added the Iraqi Cardinal "help us overcome our weaknesses and purify ourselves".

In his Pastoral Letter for Lent, the Syrian Catholic Patriarch Ignace Youssif III Younan has once again proposed fasting, prayer, penance and almsgiving as practices of conformation with Jesus himself, who teaches in the Gospel that "God does not want our sacrifices, but mercy".

To recall the Christian urgency of coming to the aid of brothers and sisters overwhelmed by the earthquake, the Maronite Cardinal and Patriarch Béchara Boutros Raï also quoted the Fathers of the Eastern Churches in his Letter for Lent.

### **Indonesian minister against closing church under harsh fiat**

(21-2-23) Indonesia's minister of religious affairs has joined Church groups in condemning the disruption of Christian worship in Lampung province on Sumatra Island by citing a controversial government decree.



A local mob on Feb. 19 forcibly stopped congregational worship at the David Tabernacle Christian Church in Rajabasa saying the place of worship did not meet the criteria prescribed under the 2006 Joint Decree of the Minister of Religion and the Minister of Home Affairs.

A minimum of 90 people need to attend the services before establishing a place of worship under the decree. However, the Church reportedly has only 70 members. The signatures of 60 members of other religious communities are also needed before setting up a church along with a recommendation from the local Religious Harmony Forum.

Minister Yaquut Cholil Qoumas said in an official statement on Feb. 21 that "there is no need for dissolution or banning" worship at the church. "All parties are responsible for creating harmony" and any problems "must be resolved by deliberation," Qoumas added.

### **Filipino bishop seeks more school counselors to fight bullying**

(21-2-23) Bishop Rex Alarcon of Daet, chairman of the Philippines Catholic Bishops' Youth Commission has urged the country's lawmakers to promptly pass a proposed law that could attract more guidance counsellors in schools to tackle the high rate of student bullying.

"Almost 18 million students have been bullied in the country and this is because of the lack of guidance counsellors to give advice to bullies and their victims... This could have been prevented by proper guidance," Bishop Alarcon told UCA News on Feb. 20. The bishop referred to a senator's statement regretting student bullying.



### **Vatican-approved Chinese bishop 'detained' once again**

(21-2-23) Authorities in China have taken away Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin of the Diocese of Yongjia (Wenzhou) along with his priest-secretary, about a year after he was released from detention, media reports say. The bishop with his secretary Father Paolo Jiang Sunian was taken earlier this year, but there has been no news about his whereabouts or whether he has been released, China Aid reported on Feb. 18.

Media reports claimed the duo was prevented from attending the funeral of

Father Leo Chen Nailiang, a priest who was loyal to the Vatican and was seen as a dissenter by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) like Bishop Zhumin.

59-year old Bishop Zhumin's appointment was not approved by the state-sanctioned Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China (BCCCC) and the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA), which he refused to join.

### **South Korean Church records decline in priestly vocation**

(21-2-23) Church officials in South Korea have asked for research and education plans as Catholics in the country experience a drop in priestly ordinations amid decreasing birth rate and religiosity.

The number of newly ordained priests dropped to 87 in 2023 from 131 in 2011, a decrease of 35 percent, according to the Statistics of the Catholic Church in Korea. the number of seminarians nationwide decreased by about 30 percent between 2011 to 2021.

Father John Chrysostom Lee Sang-yong, director of vocations in the Diocese of Suwon said the most important thing is "a change in consciousness" among Catholics, requiring them to recognize that the development of vocations is the basic duty of all faithful.

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### **Follow the Holy Spirit, not internal debates, Pope tells audience**

(22-2-23) "It is the Holy Spirit that gives life to the Church," Pope Francis told his weekly public audience on February 22. The following is the summary of his discourse.

In our continuing catechesis on apostolic zeal, the burning desire to share the joy of the Gospel, we now turn to the role of the Holy Spirit, sent by Jesus on the day of Pentecost to inaugurate the mission

of the Apostles to make disciples of all nations. In the early Church's great missionary outreach, the Holy Spirit appears as the driving force, preparing hearts to receive the Gospel and confirming the Apostles in their witness to the risen Lord. The momentous decision of the Council of Jerusalem not to require converts to observe the Mosaic law was the fruit of prayerful discernment and communicated with the formula, "it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28). In every age, the Spirit illumines and guides the Church's proclamation of the Gospel. Today, Ash Wednesday, invites us to invoke the light of the Spirit upon our individual lives as followers of Christ and on the Church's mission of bringing the consolation of Jesus to the desolation of a world that thirsts for the justice, peace and reconciled unity which are the fruit of the Lord's passover from death to life at Easter.

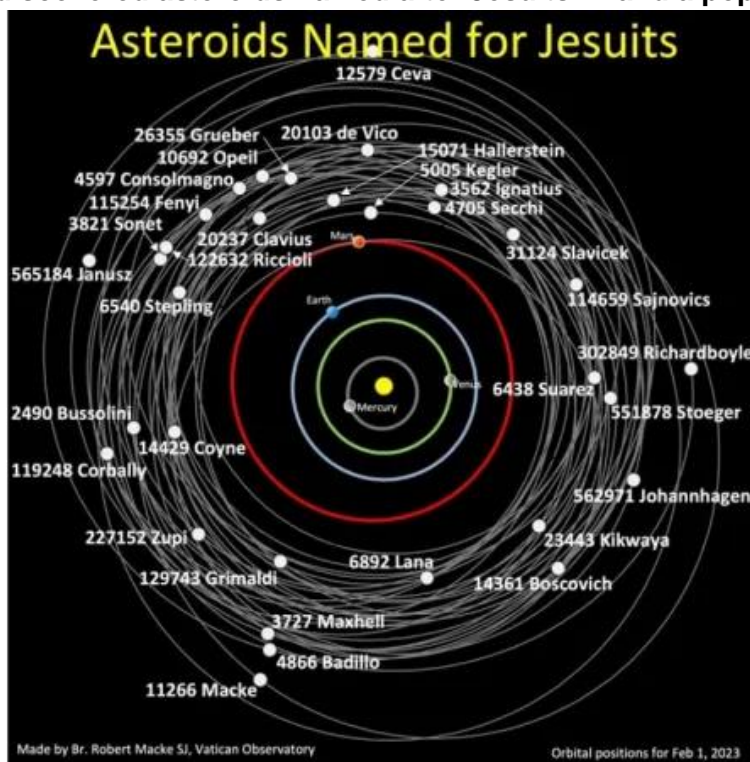
### Appeal for peace in Ukraine on anniversary of invasion

(22-2-23) At the end of the General Audience the Pope remembered that 24<sup>th</sup> February would mark one full year after the invasion of Ukraine. He fervently appealed for prayer for peace.

"The day after tomorrow, on 24 February, it will be one year since the invasion of Ukraine, since the beginning of this absurd and cruel war. A sad anniversary! The toll of dead, wounded, refugees and displaced persons, destruction, economic and social damage speaks for itself."

Pope Francis prayed that the Lord forgive so many crimes and so much violence. He is the God of peace. Exhorting everyone to remain close to the tormented Ukrainian people, he wanted the question to be raised: Has everything possible been done to stop the war? He appealed to all those who have authority over nations to make a concrete commitment to end the conflict, to achieve a cease-fire and to start peace negotiations. "What is built on rubble will never be a true victory!" he emphasized.

### Newly-discovered asteroids named after Jesuits — and a pope



(22-2-23) The Vatican Observatory announced this week the naming of four newly-discovered asteroids after notable Catholics, including Pope Gregory XIII, who began the tradition of papal astronomers and observatories. The newly-named asteroids include "560 974 Ugoboncompagni," which honors Ugo Boncompagni (1502–1585), Pope Gregory XIII.

Gregory commissioned the astronomer Father Christopher Clavius, SJ — who also has an asteroid named after him — to reform the calendar in the 16th century, leading to his namesake Gregorian calendar, still in use today.



The other three names honor Jesuit priests who work or worked at the Vatican Observatory. “562971 Johannhagen” honors Jesuit Father Johann Hagen (1847–1930), director of the Vatican Observatory from 1906 to 1930. “551878 Stoeger” honors Father Bill Stoeger, SJ (1943–2014), a cosmologist and theologian at the Vatican Observatory. Finally, “565184 Janusz” honors Jesuit Father Robert Janusz (b. 1964), currently on the staff of the observatory.

More than 30 asteroids now bear the names of Jesuits. Asteroids Johannhagen, Stoeger, and Janusz join several others already named for Vatican Observatory astronomers, including 302849 Richardboyle, 119248 Corbally, 14429 Coyne, 4597 Consolmagno, 23443 Kikwaya, and 11266 Macke.

With roots dating to 1582, the Vatican Observatory is one of the oldest active astronomical observatories in the world. Its headquarters are in Castel Gandolfo, a town just outside Rome and the location of the summer residence of the popes. Pope Leo XIII formally refounded the present observatory in 1891. The Vatican Observatory also operates the Vatican Advanced Technology Telescope, located in rural Arizona about 200 miles southeast of Phoenix.

### **States have the duty to ‘reduce the drivers of climate change,’ Vatican diplomat says**

(22-2-23) “The threat of sea-level rise appeals to our responsibility to promote, through collective and joint commitment, a culture of care, which places human dignity and the common good at the center,” Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, apostolic nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, said at a recent UN discussion on “sea-level rise: implications for international peace and security.”

“States have the duty to promote changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, to reduce the drivers of climate change and to limit the resulting environmental degradation and human suffering,” the prelate added.

### **Pontifical Academy for Life discusses emerging technologies**

(22-2-23) On February 20-21, the Pontifical Academy for Life held its 28th assembly since its founding in 1994. The theme of the assembly was “Converging on the Person: Emerging Technologies for the Common Good.” Pope Francis addressed the participants, and the Academy has posted most of the talks given at the meeting.



### **Burkina Faso - The number of the latest jihadist attacks worsens**

(22-2-23) At least 70 soldiers have been killed in four days in two different clashes with jihadist groups in northern Burkina Faso. The bloodiest clash dates back to February 17 when at least 51 soldiers were killed in an ambush between Déou and Oursi, near the borders with Mali and Niger. According to a Burkina Faso Defense source, at least 15 other soldiers were killed on February 20. Other sources speak of an even more serious toll with 19 dead and dozens missing.

Civilian victims are added to the victims among the military. The latest assault on a town in the north of the country dates back to February 13, when several dozen men on motorbikes attacked the town of Sanakadougou, in the province of Kossi. At least 12 people died and six were injured. Almost the entire town was burned down, forcing its inhabitants to abandon it without being able to take anything with them. The intensification of attacks by jihadist groups occurs at the moment when the last French troops leave the territory of Burkina Faso, due to disagreements with the military junta that took power with a second Putsch last September.

The serious situation of insecurity has been reiterated by the bishops of the Episcopal Conference of Burkina Faso and Niger (another country hit by the jihadist wave) in their recent Plenary Assembly.

### **Madagascar - The missionaries in the Anjanamasina juvenile prison: Making young people feel loved, important to someone, not a burden to get rid of**

(22-2-23) 'Trano zaza maditra', or Home for naughty boys, is the name of the state rehabilitation center which receives more than a hundred children and young people in Anjanamasina, a suburb of the capital Antananarivo. Here, for years, the Salesian missionaries of Don Bosco have been distributing meals every Sunday and during midweek holidays and are dedicated to recreational activities with the adolescents.

"Music, theatre, sports, as well as spiritual formation through the celebration of Mass, catechism and the screening of religious and educational documentaries are some of the activities in which we try to involve minors in the different stages of their detention". Father Giovanni Corselli, a Salesian missionary in Madagascar for almost 40 years, told Fides. The Home works a lot with the aim of making the young prisoners feel as good as possible. The objective of the Salesians of Don Bosco is to make them feel loved, important to someone, not a burden to get rid of, to make them understand that they are not abandoned.

### **Myanmar - Fasting from hatred: in time of Lent, the life of displaced people of the civil conflict**

(22-2-23) "Let us fast from hatred towards others, even our enemies, to discover Christ who lives in them. Let us fast from pessimism and the dark thoughts that gather in our hearts today, to fill us with Christian hope. Let's fast from worries about the future, because we want to be filled with trust and faith in God. Let's fast today from everything that separates us from Christ Jesus, to be close to Him in all respects, in this situation of labor and suffering". With these words and in a penitential spirit, the faithful of Myanmar, many of whom are internally displaced today, experience the beginning of Lent and celebrate Ash Wednesday, as Father Joseph Phe Lin Lay recounts, speaking in particular of the faithful in Chin state, in Western Myanmar.

The faithful of the Chin ethnic group, one of Myanmar's ethnic minorities pray intensely for the nation, asking God for peace, justice, healing, reconciliation, expressing closeness and solidarity with all those who suffer, especially the most vulnerable, and bearing witness to faith and charity with simple gestures such as gathering and praying together, sharing the fast, donating time and attention to comfort those who are sick or injured.



### **Sri Lankan Church dares govt to face people in local polls**

(22-2-23) The Sri Lankan Church has criticized a decision by the government to put off local council elections scheduled in March as "anti-democratic."

The Election Commission has told the Supreme Court of its inability to hold elections as planned on March 9 due to the non-availability of funds. Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith wondered if the reason for postponing the vote was the rising public dissatisfaction with the government and advised the nation's rulers "to be humble enough" to face the people and accept their verdict.

### **Indian Catholic school seeks police protection**

(22-2-23) A Catholic school in the home state of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in western India has sought police protection after a Hindu nationalist mob created a day-long ruckus, demanding to put up pictures of Hindu deities inside classrooms and at the principal's office.

Father Teles Fernandes, secretary of the Gujarat Education Board of Catholic Institutions, in a letter on Feb. 20 asked Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel to provide protection to the St Mary's High Secondary School in Amreli town and take action against the members of the mob.

When contacted, Father Fernandes told UCA News on Feb.22 that "these kinds of demands are totally unacceptable as we are living in a democratic country."

A large number of youths, claiming to be members of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) and its youth wing, Bajrang Dal or Brigade of Hanuman, who are ideologically aligned with Modi's pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), barged into the school on Feb. 20 demanding that

pictures of Hindu goddess like Saraswati Bharat Mata, besides Hanuman, among others, be installed inside classrooms and at the office of the principal.

“They reached the school campus around 10 am and left at about 5 in the evening,” school principal Father Binu Kunnel told UCA News on Feb. 22.



### **Indian Christians urged to defeat communal forces in polls**

(22-2-23) Indian Christian leaders and the apex body of the Baptist Church have asked the faithful in two Christian-majority Indian states to defeat communal forces in state elections on Feb. 27.

“We sent a communication to all our people last Sunday [Feb. 12] during the prayer service and urged them to vote against communal forces working against Christians in our country,” Reverend Zelhou Keyho, general secretary of the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC), told UCA News on Feb. 21.

In a veiled call to reject pro-Hindu candidates, the NBCC, the apex body of the Baptist Church in Nagaland, asked people to “pray and choose able leaders who would do good for the state as well as who would listen to our people and respond effectively.” Christians account for 87 percent of Nagaland’s 2.2 million people and they make up 75 percent of Meghalaya’s 3.28 million population. Both the northeastern states have a 60-seater assembly and poll results will be declared on March 2. India’s northeastern region comprises seven states. Tripura, one of them, went to the polls on Feb. 16. Christian leaders met in the capital of the largest state of Assam on Feb. 14.

### **7 out of 10 Catholics pray every day in the Philippines**

(22-2-23) Seven out of ten Catholics pray in the Philippines at least once a day, according to a survey by a private firm.

Social Weather Stations conducted the survey in the last quarter of 2022 in the Catholic-majority Philippines, stating that 69 percent of Filipino pray every day. With a sample size of 1,200 respondents around the country, the respondents were asked during the survey: “How often do you pray?” Thirty-five percent of the participants answered several times a day and 34 percent answered once a day. Together they make up 69 percent of the respondents who answered they pray at least once a day, Social Weather Stations said in a report on Feb. 20.

Jesuit and Filipino anthropologist Father Albert Alejo said the numbers could be attributed to Catholics who pray before and after meals. Father Alejo, who teaches at the Jesuit-run Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, said eating was “just one of the communal” practices of the Catholic faith by a Filipino family. “There are many others, like praying the rosary together, praying before driving or working, even praying before an exam. All of these are practices of faith that are social and communal,” Father Alejo told UCA News.

### **Korean Church, labour groups slam crackdown on migrants**

(22-2-23) Catholic and civic labour groups in South Korea have criticized a government crackdown on undocumented migrant workers and called for changes to make the systems more labor-friendly.

The groups said that the government raid and arrest of undocumented migrants aiming to reduce the number of expatriate workers is tantamount to human rights violations, the *Catholic Peace Broadcasting Corporation (CBPC)* of Korea reported on Feb. 22.

23-2-23

### **Vatican: Putin suspending nuclear treaty is ‘move in the wrong direction’**

(23-2-23) Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, the Holy See's Secretary for Relations with States and International Organizations, reacted to Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to suspend New START, a 2010 nuclear weapons treaty between Russia and the US.

### **Concretely combat 'scourge' of hunger, Pope urges faithful of Brazil**

(23-2-23) Pope Francis sent a message to the Church in Brazil for its 2023 Campaign for Fraternity. The papal message is currently available in Italian and Portuguese.

### **UGCC declares a solemn day of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving**

(23-2-23) February 24, the first anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, will be a solemn day of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving for the faithful of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church.

"Let this day be an opportunity for us to do good for someone: to comfort the afflicted, to clothe the naked, to warm those who are freezing, to feed the hungry," said Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk. "Let us offer our spiritual efforts and our prayers for the victory of the Ukrainian people in this unequal battle, as well as for our army."

### **Ailing Pope curtails schedule**

(23-2-23) Pope Francis cut back his schedule on Thursday, February 23, because of what the Vatican press office described as a "strong cold."

The Pontiff participated in two private audiences in the morning, but did not read his prepared statements, instead distributing copies of the text. An audience scheduled for the afternoon was cancelled.

### **Pope lauds pure science, cautions on 'improper influences'**

(23-2-23) In a February 23 private audience with members of the Max Planck Society, Pope Francis praised the work of pure scientific research, insisting that it must "remain free from improper influences, whether political or economic in nature."

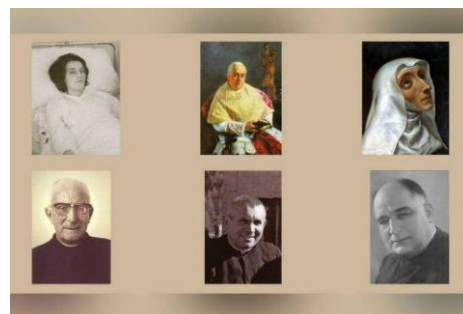
Pure science, the Pontiff said, probes "the issue of ultimate meaning—namely the direction toward which all this is moving." He cautioned, however, against the "trans-humanist project," saying: "If the ability to solve problems is severed from the need to be intelligent in doing so, intentionality and thus the ethical nature of action will be abolished."

### **Vatican advances six causes for beatification**

(23-2-23) The Vatican Dicastery for the Causes of Saints on February 23 issued a decree confirming a miracle attributed to Ven. Elisabetta Martinez (1905—1991), an Italian religious and therefore is eligible for beatification. The dicastery also confirmed the "heroic virtue" of:

Giuseppe di Sant'Elpidio (1885—1974), an Italian Capuchin priest, Aloísio Sebastião Boeing (1913-2006), a Brazilian priest, Margherita Lussana (1852—1935), an Italian religious, Francisca Ana María

Alcover Morell (1912—1954), a Spanish lay woman and Albertina Violi Zironoli (1901—1972), an Italian lay woman. Their causes will be taken by the Vatican for official enquiry leading to their eventual beatification.



### **Pontifical Academy reflects on 'post-humanism'**

(23-2-23) At a February 23 press conference, the Pontifical Academy for Life reported on the results of a three-day conference on "Converging on the person: Emerging Technologies for the Common Good."

"We are talking about post-humanism, enhanced man, and so on," explained Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, the president of the Pontifical Academy. Msgr. Renzo Pegorano, the chancellor, said that the conference touched on "the positive contributions to human life and the planet that are coming from

converging technologies,” as well as “the fears, risks and uncertainties that may emerge from a use of technology to the detriment of human well-being.”

### **Pope speaks with Orthodox clerics on ecumenism, calls for end to sanctions on Syria**

(23-2-23) Pope Francis met on February 23 priests and monks of the Eastern Orthodox churches, and told them that “as believers we must believe that the more we walk together, the more we will be mysteriously accompanied by Jesus, because unity is a common pilgrimage.”

Observing that some of the Orthodox clerics were from Syria, where people stricken by war now suffer from the aftermath of an earthquake as well, the Pope renewed his call for an end to sanctions that “hinder the urgent and necessary aid to the population.”

### **Vatican ‘foreign minister’ celebrates Mass for Ukraine**

(23-2-23) As the first anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine approached, Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, the Holy See’s Secretary for Relations with States and International Organizations, celebrated a Mass for Ukraine at the Basilica of Sant’Andrea della Valle in Rome. Bishop Dionisio Lachovicz, OSBM, the Apostolic Exarch of Italy for the faithful of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, concelebrated the Mass.

### **Dublin archbishop denounces city’s bid to tax ‘vacant’ church properties**

(23-2-23) Archbishop Dermot Farrell of Dublin, Ireland, has denounced a bid to tax vacant properties owned by the Church.

The archbishop says that 32 properties that have been classified as vacant by the city are vacant—24 churches and 8 parish halls—are actually use regularly for services. He said that the designation of churches as vacant buildings is “an extraordinary attack on the Catholic faith.”

The designation of some churches as vacant comes at a time when the archdiocese is weighing plans to “restructure” parishes, due to a sharp decline in the number of available priests and the number of Catholics attending Mass.

(23-2-23) **Vatican, Oman establish diplomatic relations.** There are now only six nations in the world that do not have official diplomatic ties with the Vatican: China, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Bhutan, the Maldives, and Tuvalu.

### **Sri Lanka - Lent, "a journey through trials and suffering, towards full joy"**

(23-2-23) "What we are living different from previous years, through a situation of great even moral suffering. We see especially in political life and common good: it is a very makes us reflect", says to Fernando, a priest of the



this year is a Lent somewhat because Sri Lanka is going economic, political, social, and a decline of moral values , in those who should act for the unpleasant situation and one that Fides Father Basil Rohan Archdiocese of Colombo and

National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies on the island of the Indian subcontinent.

"Many citizens, many families, including Catholics - recalls the priest - find themselves in a real situation of poverty and have no food to feed themselves. Many are in a state of deprivation and precariousness. This is why Lent is a time of return to God and a time to experience the works of mercy: we try to spend time with God in prayer and Adoration, we celebrate the Stations of the Cross every Friday, and we offer acts of charity toward the needy, of whom there are many".

In the local Church, reports Father Fernando, Pope Francis' Message for Lent has been translated into the local language and disseminated to all communities "with the intention of preparing our hearts to joyfully celebrate the Resurrection of Christ".

### **DR Congo - In the east of the Country: Around 10 million people depend on humanitarian aid**

(23-2-23) A total of 2.25 billion dollars is needed to help the 10 million people in the three eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Ituri, North and South Kivu) who, according to the Humanitarian Plan 2023 of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) are in need of assistance. The most urgent needs concern the 5.7 million internally displaced people due to insecurity and fighting in North Kivu.

According to OCHA, the humanitarian crisis has been exacerbated over the past 12 months by an increase in violence, particularly in North Kivu, where more than 600,000 people have been displaced since March 2022 as fighting by armed group M23 resumed.

### **French Polynesia - "PUTUPUTURA'A", the meeting of the Catholics of the Raromatai archipelago**

(23-2-23) The mission of the laity baptized in the Church was the focus of the three-day meeting that has just ended in Uturoa on the island of Raiatea in the Raromatai archipelago, the Leeward Islands. The meeting, which brought together the Catholics of the archipelago, took place from Sunday evening 19 to 22 February.

"Every 6 months we create a meeting, which we call PUTUPUTURA'A here, during which the 4 islands share 3 days, presided over by the Archbishop of Papeete, Jean Pierre Cottanceau, SS.CC", wrote Father Sandro Lafranconi to Fides, a priest of the Society of African Missions (SMA) missionary in the Archipelago.

"On this occasion, we paused to reflect on the Synod - explained Fr. Lafranconi who has been in charge of the pastoral care of the Raromatai since August 2022. In particular, Archbishop Cottanceau deepened the paragraphs of Lumen Gentium, the Dogmatic Constitution of the Second Vatican Council, dedicated to the laity in the mission of the Church. It is a significant event - the missionary underlined - also considering "the traditionally Protestant fabric of the population".

### **Filipinos protest as Marcos family cleared in graft case**

(23-2-23) Philippine rights activists and martial law victims staged protests after a special anti-graft court acquitted the family of former President Ferdinand Marcos in another forfeiture case.

The special court, known as Sandiganbayan, on Feb. 22 junked yet another civil forfeiture case against the Marcos family after its lawyers objected to the photocopied evidence presented in the case by the prosecution.

The latest ruling resulted in the dismissal of a fifth case in the government's attempts to forfeit the alleged ill-gotten wealth of the Marcos family and its allies, according to court records.

Human rights group Bagong Alyansang Makabayan, also known as Bayan, criticized the court ruling and expressed doubt over government lawyers' dedication to pursuing the ill-gotten wealth of the Marcos family and its allies.

### **Pakistani Christians oppose polling on Easter Sunday**

(23-2-23) Christian leaders in Pakistan have joined opposition leaders in demanding the rescheduling of elections in two provincial assemblies slated for April 9 citing Easter festivities. Father Inayat Barnard, the chaplain of Caritas Pakistan, criticized the unilateral decision to hold the polls of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab provincial assemblies on Easter Sunday and said the people should be made aware of "this unwanted announcement." "The Christian members of national and provincial assemblies should bring this 'presidential negligence' to the notice of speakers and change the date," Father Barnard said.



24-2-23

### **Pope nationalizes Vatican assets, property in new reform**

(24-2-23) On his own initiative (*motu proprio*), Pope Francis has issued an apostolic letter declaring that the assets and property of the dicasteries of the Roman Curia and related entities are the assets and property of the Holy See itself.

Entitled *Il diritto nativo* [The native right], the letter on the patrimony of the Apostolic See is dated February 20 and was made public on February 23. Vatican News published English-language excerpts in its summary of the letter.

### **Secretariat of State publishes full ‘Jews series’ of historical archive online**

(24-2-23) The historical archive of the Vatican Secretariat of State’s Section for Relations with States and International Organizations has posted online its *Serie Ebrei* (“Jews Series”): 170 volumes of “petitions for assistance sent by Jews, baptized and unbaptized, from all over Europe to Pope Pius XII after the start of Nazi-Fascist persecution.”

The Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs—the predecessor of the Section for Relations with States—“tasked a diplomatic official (Msgr. Angelo Dell’Acqua) with handling these petitions in an effort to provide the petitioners with all possible assistance,” according to the Secretariat of State.

### **Cardinal Müller laments ‘brutal intolerance’ of traditionalist liturgy**

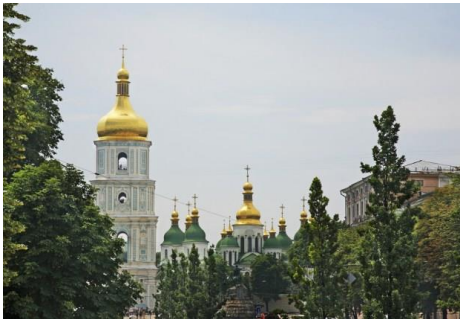
(24-2-23) Cardinal Gerhard Müller has decried the “brutal intolerance” of the Vatican toward traditionalist Catholics.

The former prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith said that new restrictions on the traditional Latin Mass are “pastorally counterproductive.” He added that the latest restrictions degrades the authority of diocesan bishops and “obscures the true meaning of the papacy,” which should promote Church unity.

### **Pope thanks donors to papal charity**

(24-2-23) Pope Francis met on February 24 members of the Pro Petri Sede Association, to thank them for their work in raising funds for papal charities.

The Pope said that the papal charities provide support for people who “suffer from war, violence, exclusion, material and spiritual poverty.” He remarked that the start of Lent is a good time to recall the need for such almsgiving.



### **Ukrainian Orthodox bodies deplore invasion, blast Russian Orthodox Church**

(24-2-23) The Orthodox Church of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) have issued a joint statement condemning “Russia’s military aggression against the sovereign Ukrainian state” as “the culmination of centuries of imperial pressure on our people’s spiritual and cultural identity.”

“Russia has always denied the right of the local Ukrainian Church to exist,” the statement continued. “The Russian Orthodox Church

invades the canonical territory of Ukrainian churches and blesses Russia’s occupation and war crimes on the territory of the Ukrainian state.”

The two churches pledged greater cooperation, including “a direct dialogue without any preconditions to develop models that would make it possible to unite the UOC and the OCU into one local church in the future.”

### **China - Identity of Buddhist and Taoist monks available online**

(24-2-23) An "online archive" containing the identification data of all Buddhist and Taoist monks registered with the Chinese authorities, which can also be consulted by citizens who, from now on, will now be able to verify their identity and the task of each monk.

According to the official Chinese media, information about "Islamic, Catholic and Protestant clergy" will soon be made available in China as of Wednesday, February 22.

### **Haiti - Chaotic conditions: There has been no news of Father Noah since the kidnapping two weeks ago**

(24-2-23) Haiti is marked by hunger, violence, cholera and political instability. The Caribbean island is now a shattered country without institutions, with a starving population and armed gangs that continue to strike everywhere. The political and economic crisis has deepened following the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in 2021 and citizen protests against the high cost of living and social insecurity. New elections are not likely to take place until rampant gang violence subsides. In 2022, the country experienced a political deadlock, rising gas and water prices, and a wave of gang violence involving kidnappings and killings, including the kidnapping of Father Antoine Macaire Christian Noah. The Claretian missionary was kidnapped on February 7th and to this day there is still no news of him.



Armed violence is also targeting schools and other educational institutions, and the education system is in danger of collapsing since criminal gangs began attacking schools. At the beginning of February, around 30 schools in the country's urban areas had to be closed due to violence. Since October 2022, more than a quarter of educational institutions have been closed. This also increases the risk of children being recruited by armed groups.

Haiti today has a population of about 12 million people. According to official estimates by the United Nations Fund, about 19,000 Haitians are on the brink of starvation. Almost half of the population is in need of help. More than 457 people have died from cholera and there are currently another 22,500 suspected cases. More than 155,000 people have been displaced, mostly due to gang violence.

### **Indian protestant bishop arrested under conversion law**

(24-2-23) A Protestant bishop in the Central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh has been remanded to judicial custody over allegations he violated the provisions of the state's stringent anti-conversion law. Auxiliary Bishop Paul Muniya of the Protestant Shalom Church in the Jhabua district, inhabited predominantly by tribal communities, surrendered to the local police on Feb. 23 to comply with an order issued by the Madhya Pradesh High Court. "The high court order said he would be granted bail once he surrendered to the police, but instead he was sent to jail," the bishop's son Kaleb Muniya told UCA News on Feb. 24.

Police charged Bishop Muniya under the state's anti-conversion law following a complaint by local resident Kailash Bhuria on Jan. 11. Bhuria alleged that he was being intimidated to attend prayer services by the bishop and Tita Bhuria, a church elder. The duo in September last year took him to a nearby church and sprinkled water on him, gave him a Bible and a cross, he said. The bishop accompanied by the church elder also visited his house in January and threatened to ostracize him from the village for not attending prayer services.

### **Asian bishops gather in Bangkok for continental-level synod**

(24-2-23) Catholic bishops in Asia have been urged to become the "source of hope" as the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality began in Thailand to discern, discuss, and deliberate on the ways to make the church more participatory.

"We have to be the source of hope because we have the Gospel of life, the Gospel of hope, and we are the ones working together in solidarity on the path of this synodality," said Archbishop Tarcisio Isao Kikuchi of Tokyo, Japan, secretary general of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), during the inaugural Mass of the Holy Spirit.



The continental-level synod comes as a preparation for the Bishops' Synod in the Vatican, which will finalize ways on making the Church more participatory. The Vatican event will conclude next year. "The Church has to be at the center of producing hope. [The] Church should not be the source of despair and sadness," Archbishop Kikuchi said in his homily. The Mass was held at the Baan Phu Waan (The Sower's House) Pastoral Training Centre of the Bangkok Archdiocese, on Feb. 24. The image of the Church as a "tent" makes it "a place of refuge" and expresses the fact that "God can pitch his tent wherever the Spirit of God blows, including places of violence, disorder and suffering", said the delegates present in Bangkok, who came from 17 Episcopal Conferences and 2 Episcopal Synods, representing the 29 countries that make up the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). During this three-day synodal discussion - in which 6 Cardinals, 5 Archbishops, 18 Bishops, 28 priests, 4 nuns and 19 lay people took part, expressing the pluralism of the Asian continent - the objective is to underline that "in the tent, there is room for everyone; no one is excluded, because it is a home for everyone, a sacred and safe space".



### **Malaysia's new Vatican envoy to promote interfaith dialogue**

(24-2-23) Malaysia's newly appointed ambassador to the Holy See from Christian-majority Sarawak has termed his selection as "unique" and has vowed to work towards interfaith dialogue and the well-being of Malaysians.

"It is a bit unique, and we do not have trade and investments. What we are doing is to promote interfaith dialogue between the different faiths all over the world," said Hendy Assan who is the third Bidayuh indigenous tribe member to be appointed to the post. The first-ever Bidayuh ambassador was John Tenewe Nuek who has retired.

Bidayuh is a collective name used to identify several indigenous groups found in southern Sarawak, Malaysia, and northern West Kalimantan, Indonesia, on the island of Borneo, which are broadly similar in language and culture.

Assan also voiced his hope to increase socio-cultural and educational ties during his tenure to further strengthen the relationship between Malaysia and the Holy See, *The Borneo Post* reported on Feb. 22.

### **US joins global calls to release Myanmar's Baptist pastor**

(24-2-23) The global calls for the immediate release of a Baptist minister in Myanmar have grown louder with the US State Department joining Baptist churches and rights groups around the world in condemning his arrest and detention by the military junta.

Reverend Dr. Hkalam Samson, a former head of the Kachin Baptist Convention, was detained by local authorities at Mandalay International Airport on Dec. 4 while on his way to Bangkok for a medical examination.

25-2-23

### **Egypt - Three-year prison sentence for the "vlogger" who offended Christian symbols**

(25-2-23) The court for minor crimes in Alexandria sentenced Egyptian "vlogger" Osama Lotfy Sharaf El-Din on Thursday 23 February to three years in prison for having spread sacrilegious videos through social networks that offended symbols of the Christian faith.

Osama Lotfy Sharaf El-Din, who in his "performances" on social networks is known by the nickname of "Egyptian prince", was arrested in October 2022 after spreading videos and posts on Facebook and Tiktok in which sacrilegious acts were performed and they uttered offensive sentences against the Bible, the crucifix and the Christian faith. The prosecutor who ordered the arrest accused the "vlogger" of having committed sacrilegious acts against an Abrahamic religion and of having sown discord among the Egyptians, attacking national unity. During the session of the court that sentenced the defendant, the offending videos were also viewed.

26-2-23

### **Equal rights to dalits also – Bishop**

(26-2-23) Days after a group of Dalit Christians alleged caste discrimination by the dominant community in the St Mary Magdalene Church in Ayyampatti near Tiruverambur in Tiruchy, southern Indian state of Tamilnadu, the District Collector was given assurance on 24 February that mandatory tax will be collected also from Dalit Christians and also the the forum would be formed comprising Dalit Christians to decide on Church affairs.

Bishop S.Arockiaraj had given advice already in July 2022 to give equal rights to the Dalits also, which the dominant community would not comply with. The Parish priest was asked to vacate his room instead. Though the Dalits could take part in worship, at the Annual Church feast in July, the mandatory tax would not be collected from them and the car would not come to their street.

### **Pope: Seek unity with God, welcome His Word in face of temptation**

On this first Sunday of Lent, Pope Francis spoke at the midday Angelus about the spiritual struggle of Lent and explained how in the desert Jesus defeats the temptations of the Devil, who is the "divider." He illustrated how we too must respond to temptation to sin by recalling the Word of God and putting our trust always in the Lord who is ever ready to help us in our journey of faith.

The devil's temptation was to separate Jesus from His union with the Father Who at His baptism called Him His beloved Son. *"Attachment to material things, mistrust and the thirst for power are three widespread and dangerous temptations, which the devil uses to divide us from the Father and to make us no longer feel like brothers and sisters among ourselves, to lead us to solitude and desperation,"* the Pope pointed out.

*Jesus never enters into dialogue with the devil, he does not negotiate with him, but he repels his insinuations with the beneficent Words of the Scripture.* In this way He sets an example to us, Pope Francis said.

### **By Vatican News staff writer**

Offering his **customary reflections** on the Sunday Gospel before leading the recitation of the Angelus, Pope Francis spoke about how Jesus in the desert was tempted by the devil - which means "divider," as the devil always wants to create divisions. The Gospel reading on this first Sunday of Lent highlights the spiritual struggle Jesus and we all face in our daily lives of opposing temptation through our trust in God and with assistance from our knowledge of the Word of God.

The Pope pointed out how the devil tries to "divide" or separate Jesus from His union with the Father. Jesus received His baptism from John and was called by the Father "My beloved Son," with the Holy Spirit descending upon Him in the form of a dove, the Pope recalled, showing the three divine Persons joined in love. Jesus came into the world to help us partake in this union of love, while the devil instead tries to divide Jesus from this unity and His mission of unity for us, the Pope went on to say.

### **Challenging the three "poisons"**

The Pope then explained how the devil tries to take advantage of Jesus' tiredness and hunger after fasting forty days by trying to administer three "poisons" to jeopardize His mission of unity. The poisons are attachment, mistrust, and power, he explained, adding how insidious these dangerous temptations are: attachment to material goods when the devil tries to get Jesus to stop fasting and to transform the stones into bread; mistrust by trying to get Jesus to test the Father by throwing Himself off the highest point of the temple in order to be saved; and finally power when the devil suggests Jesus take over worldly kingdoms.

*"But that is just how it is, for us too: attachment to material things, mistrust and the thirst for power are three widespread and dangerous temptations, which the devil uses to divide us from the Father and to make us no longer feel like brothers and sisters among ourselves, to lead us to solitude and desperation. He wanted to do this to Jesus, he wants to do it to us: to lead us to desperation."*

### **Defeating the temptations**

Jesus rejects and defeats the three temptations by avoiding any debate and discussion with the devil and by answering with the Word of God, the Pope underscored, noting the importance of never discussing or dialoguing with the devil. The three verses from Sacred Scripture that Jesus pronounces that oppose the three temptations speak of freedom from goods (cf. Dt 8:3), trust (cf. Dt 6:16), and service to God (cf. Dt 6:13).

*"Jesus never enters into dialogue with the devil, he does not negotiate with him, but he repels his insinuations with the beneficent Words of the Scripture. It is an invitation to us too; one cannot defeat him by negotiating with him, he is stronger than us. We defeat the devil by countering him in faith with the divine*

*Word. In this way, Jesus teaches us to defend unity with God and among ourselves from the attacks of the divider. The divine Word that is Jesus' answer to the temptation of the devil."*

In conclusion, the Pope suggested we reflect on how the Word of God guides our own lives and how it can help us in our spiritual struggles. If we have a recurring temptation, we should seek help from a verse of the Word of God that helps us, something we can remember, recite, and pray by "trusting in the grace of Christ," he explained.

*"Let us try, it will help us in temptation, it will help us a great deal, so that, amid the voices that stir within us, the beneficent one of the Word of God will resound. May Mary, who welcomed the Word of God and with her humility defeated the pride of the divider, accompany us in the spiritual struggle of Lent."*

### **Pope prays for an end to violence in the Holy Land and Burkina Faso**

(26-2-23) In renewed appeals following his Sunday Angelus, Pope Francis called for prayers and for peace for the countless victims of violence in the Holy Land and Burkina Faso. In light of recent tragedies, Pope Francis noted that many people, including children, are being killed and he asked, "How can we put an end to this spiral of violence?" The Holy Father then renewed, once more, his appeal that "dialogue may reign over hatred and revenge".

"I pray to God for the Palestinians and the Israelis, that they may find the road to fraternity and peace, with the help of the international community".

Pope Francis then shared his worries regarding the situation in Burkina Faso, where "terrorist attacks continue to take place". He hoped that the violence the people continue to endure might not lead them to lose hope in their journey of democracy, justice, and peace.

### **Pope: we must all do politics for the common good**

(26-2-23) "El Pastor", the book by journalists Francesca Ambrogetti and Sergio Rubin, out these days in Argentina, is the result of several interviews with the Pope on the most important and urgent issues of the Church. From politics to economics, from reforms in the Roman Curia to threats to the 'common home'. Space is also given to some personal aspects, regarding a trip to Argentina Francis says that 'it is unfair to say that I do not want to go'

Politics is one of the central themes. 'Yes, I do politics,' the Pope replies, 'because everyone must do politics. And what is politics? A way of life for the polis, for the city. What I do not do, nor should the Church do, is party politics. But the Gospel has a political dimension, which is to transform the social, even religious, mentality of people' so that it is directed to the common good.

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"If we have a recurring temptation, we should seek help from a verse of the Word of God that helps us, something we can remember, recite, and pray by "trusting in the grace of Christ," Pope Francis