

CATHOLIC WORLD LAST WEEK

(CWLW)

8-14 May 2023

8-5-23

St. Peter's Basilica hosts weekly candlelight Rosary processions during May



(8-5-23) On Saturdays in May, St. Peter's Basilica is hosting a weekly candlelight Rosary procession.

The Vatican newspaper reported that the prelates scheduled to lead the processions are Archbishop Vittorio Francesco Viola (Secretary of the Dicastery for Divine Worship, May 6), Cardinal Fernando Vérgez Alzaga (President of the Governorate of Vatican City State, May 13), Cardinal Mario Grech (Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, May 20), and Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra (Substitute of the Secretariat of State, May 27).

Hundreds commemorate slain Palestinian Catholic journalist at memorial Mass

(8-5-23) Shireen Abu Akleh, a leading Palestinian-American journalist and a Melkite Greek Catholic laywoman, was killed last May. Her family met Pope Francis in October.

Sudan - New agreement for a 7-day truce: the population on the brink of collapse and the capital remains under siege

(8-5-23) There has been no truce for the Sudanese population since armed clashes began on April 15 between the regular army of General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and the paramilitaries of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) of General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo. According to estimates, since the beginning of the conflict at least 700 people have died. It is recent news that, after several ceasefire agreements, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of South Sudan has declared that an agreement in principle has been reached on a seven-day truce. The meeting between representatives of the warring military parties was held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, while Arab foreign affairs ministers were in Cairo for an emergency meeting of the Inter-Arab Organization dedicated to the crisis in Sudan. However, despite the new ceasefire, scheduled from 4 to 11 May, military attacks continue and Khartoum remains under siege. The situation is dramatic, the local press reports daily assaults on homes and businesses and armed men robbing banks.

South Africa - Stateless children: An invisible problem in southern Africa

(8-5-23) According to the latest UNICEF figures, there are more than 642,000 children living in South Africa as migrants or displaced persons. This number includes refugees, asylum seekers, victims of human trafficking or smuggling, and unaccompanied and separated migrant minors.

Among them are numerous stateless minors, who therefore do not enjoy any protection from a state. The issue was recently discussed by the Working Group on Migration and Human Trafficking of the Justice, Peace and Development Commission of the Symposium of the Bishops' Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM).

Speaking at the conference, Archbishop Buti Joseph Tlhagale of Johannesburg pointed out that "the ongoing conflicts in African countries are the reason for the presence of so many stateless children". The Archbishop of Johannesburg pointed to human trafficking and forced migration due to climate change as other factors contributing to the rise in the number of stateless children in Africa.

Four Indonesian Catholics face sedition charge over ASEAN protest

(8-5-23) Police in Indonesia's Catholic-majority Flores Island summoned two Catholic villagers and two local activists and accused them of sedition over a planned protest during the upcoming summit of Southeast Asian leaders over the compensation for houses and land clearing for a road.

The villagers and activists planned to demonstrate in front of the ASEAN summit venue in Labuan Bajo, a popular tourist town, during the meetings on May 9-11. However, the West Manggarai District Police issued summons to farmers, Dominikus Safio Bion and Viktor Frumentius, and activists, Doni Parera and Ladis Jeharun, both Catholics, on May 7 and accused them of sedition. The police action came two days after they applied for permission to hold the rally on the first day of the summit to demand compensation for the road project. The 25-kilometer road stretch having a width of 23 meters was inaugurated by President Joko Widodo on March 14. The protesters alleged that at least 51 families from the villages of Cambi, Nalis, and Kenari, most of whom were farmers, were evicted while 23 houses, 14,050 square meters of yards, 1,790 square meters of rice fields, and 1,080 square meters of fields were taken away by the government without any compensation.

Pakistan - Two new chapels and two new priests in the Archdiocese of Lahore

(8-5-23) One is the church of Saint John Mary of Vianney, named after the Curé of Ars, a figure dear to the priests and faithful of Lahore; the second is the Church of Saint Clarence, Bishop of Vienne, France. These are the two new chapels and mission stations that the Archbishop of Lahore, Sebastian Francis Shaw OFM, inaugurated and blessed during a pastoral visit to the parish of the Holy Spirit, in the town of Sangla Hill, in the Pakistani province of Punjab.



The Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) Congregation of Pakistan has also celebrated another event in recent days: the priestly ordination of two missionaries, Father Adeel Amir OMI and Father Tasneem Nawaz OMI, who received the sacrament of Holy Orders at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Lahore on April 21.

Chinese Christians face hefty fines for ‘illegal gatherings’

(8-5-23) A court in a city in southeast China ordered a Protestant pastor and his wife to pay a fine equivalent to US\$25,000 for allegedly organizing ‘illegal gatherings’ with house church Christians, reports a rights group.

Yang Xibo, pastor of Xunsiding Church at Xiamen in Fujian province, and his wife Wang Xiaofei were asked to pay the amount by the court after they lost an appeal against an administrative lawsuit, ChinaAid reported.

The couple was accused and fined for organizing illegal gatherings by Siming District People’s Government in July 2021. Their appeal for reconsideration of the penalty was rejected, forcing the couple to appeal against the decision from Xiamen Municipal Intermediate People’s Court.

The court revoked their appeal and upheld the initial administrative penalty.

Church appeals for peace in northeastern Indian state

(8-5-23) Catholic Church leaders have appealed for calm in India’s northeastern state of Manipur where 37 people have reportedly been killed and some 23,000 people displaced in ethnic violence since last week.

“The Catholic Church is very much concerned for the people of Manipur, irrespective of which tribe or community they belong to,” the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India (CBCI) said in a statement on May 5.

Blasphemy lynching scares Pakistani Christians

(8-5-12) A mob in Pakistan lynched a Muslim cleric for allegedly committing blasphemy by defaming Prophet Muhammad on the 25th death anniversary of Catholic Bishop John Joseph who killed himself protesting controversial blasphemy law.

Nigar Alam, 40, was beaten to death on May 6 after he made a speech during a political rally in the northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. He reportedly said he respected a local administrator as much as Prophet Muhammad, enraging a crowd in Sawal Dher village of Mardan, police said. The police initially managed to bring Alam to safety in a nearby shop, but the crowd forcibly dragged him out after breaking the door and beat him to death. The killing took place on the same day when Bishop Indrias Rehmat of Faisalabad distributed shields among 25 associates of Bishop Joseph, the former bishop of the diocese, as an act of honour. Bishop Joseph shot himself on May 6, 1998, in front of a court in Sahiwal after a Christian, Ayub Masih, was sentenced to death for allegedly insulting the founder of Islam. In 2002, the Supreme Court overturned Masih's conviction and released him.

9-5-23

Pope encourages Spiritans in their mission

(9-5-23) On May 8, Pope Francis received members of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, also known as the Spiritans or Holy Ghost Fathers. The Pontiff noted that 2023 marks the 175th anniversary of the institute's refounding by Venerable Francis Libermann.

"Thanks to your willingness to change and your perseverance, you have remained faithful to the spirit of the origins: evangelizing the poor, accepting the missions where no one wants to go, favouring service to the most abandoned, respecting peoples and cultures, forming local clergy and laypeople for an integral human development, all in fraternity and simplicity of life and in assiduity of prayer," Pope Francis said. "Please, this last thing is important: pray, do not forget prayer."

Referring to the Holy Spirit, Pope Francis added, "Let him enlighten you, orient you, drive you where he wishes, without imposing conditions, without excluding anyone, because it is he who knows what is needed in every age and in every moment."

Cardinal O'Malley acknowledges 'growing pains' of papal abuse commission

(9-5-23) The Vatican's special commission on sexual abuse has shifted its focus "toward a more impact-focused direction."

Cardinal Sean O'Malley, who chairs the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, reported that at a meeting in Rome last week, the panel approved new policies aimed at "a human-centered design methodology that focuses on how the needs of victims and survivors can be prioritized and addressed in the Church's reporting mechanisms with the purpose of offering proposals to the Holy Father on how gaps can be addressed."

Although he spoke in general terms about the commission's work, Cardinal O'Malley indirectly acknowledged recent criticism of the body, saying that an "accelerated pace over the last six months has caused growing pains."

Authenticity is key to evangelization: Pope tells Hungarian Jesuits

(9-5-23) Meeting with his fellow Jesuits on April 29, Pope Francis said: "Young people do not tolerate double-talk." The key to reaching young people, the Pope said, is authenticity.

As has become his custom during a foreign visit, the Pope made time to meet with Jesuits for a question-and-answer session in Budapest, and the transcript of his exchange was posted by the Jesuit journal *Civiltà Cattolica*. During the meeting the Pope also said:

- Reaction against the modern is "a nostalgic disease," and that is the reason why he insisted that priests obtain permission to celebrate the traditional liturgy.
- "Even talking to an abuser makes us sick," yet even those who abuse children need pastoral care. "The abuser is to be condemned, indeed, but as a brother. Condemning him is to be understood as an act of charity."

During his tenure as Jesuit provincial under a military regime, "the situation in Argentina was bewildering and it was not at all clear what should be done... It was a very painful affair."

Pope, Coptic leader pen preface to book on ecumenical encounter

(9-5-23) Pope Francis and Pope Tawadros II are the joint authors of a preface to a new book on ecumenical dialogue between the Catholic and Coptic Orthodox churches. The book traces the ecumenical talks that began in 1973 with a meeting between Pope Paul VI and Pope Shenouda III.

Ousted Caritas International leader rips Vatican ‘power grab’ (AP)

(9-5-23) The former head of Caritas International, who was dismissed last November, has charged that his ouster was part of a “brutal power grab” by the Vatican, reflecting a “colonialist” attitude toward development programs.

Aloysius John was removed—along with other leaders of the international consortium of Catholic relief agencies—amid reports of arbitrary management practices that had allegedly damaged morale among employees. But John says that the decision to change Caritas leadership was “made in haste, with incredible violence and very poor public communication.” He insists that an independent review would have found no serious management problems.

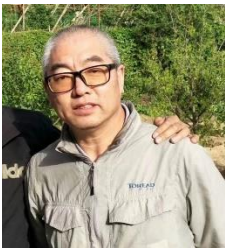
In a letter obtained by Associated Press, protesting his removal, John said that unhappy Caritas officials had resisted his leadership because he represented a “Southern” alternative to their “Northern” ideas about international charity work. (John is a French citizen but his family is from India.)

Vatican official outlines plans for 2025 Jubilee

(9-5-23) Archbishop Rino Fisichella, the pro-prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization, outlined plans for the 2025 Jubilee Year at a press conference on May 9.

The preparations have included consultations with Italian government officials, to plan for accommodating the crowds expected in Rome, and the construction of an official web site: www.iubilaeum2025.va.

The archbishop mentioned special events planned for the Jubilee, including an exhibition of works by El Greco that have never before left Spain; and an ecumenical conference to celebrate the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicea. For 2023, Archbishop Fisichella added, Pope Francis has requested special attention to “the rediscovery of the four Constitutions of the Second Vatican Council” as preparation for the Jubilee Year.



Chinese bishop still detained, two years after protesting illicit ordinations

(9-5-23) Bishop Simone Zhang Jianlin, the vicar general of the Xuanhua diocese, remains imprisoned, two years after he was arrested for public statements protesting canonical irregularities in the ordination of priests.

AsiaNews reports that government officials have to date ignored pleas for the bishop’s release on humanitarian grounds, since his 90-year-old mother is seriously ill.

Missionaries of Charity purchase Mother Teresa’s first home for poor

(9-5-23) The Missionaries of Charity have completed the purchase of the first home for the poor, set up in Calcutta by their founder, Mother Teresa.

DR Congo - More than 400 dead due to floods: a tragedy caused by poor land management?

(9-5-23) The catastrophic floods that hit the residents of the Kalehe area, in the province of South Kivu, east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, on May 4th, in particular inundating the villages of Bushushu and Nyamukubi, have so far claimed 400 lives . This number is likely to increase further, since the first bodies of the missing are now being found after the water level has dropped. In addition to the victims, there are numerous injured people who are being treated in the local health centres and in the provincial capital Bukavu.

Rescue operations continue, with priority given to burying the bodies to avoid outbreaks of epidemics.

First aid shipments of medicine, tents and food from the South Kivu provincial government arrived on Saturday, local sources said. Meanwhile, President Félix Tshisekedi declared national mourning. The tragedy happened on the night of May 4-5 when torrential rains hit the Kalehe area and the rivers and streams in the area swelled. The masses of water quickly burst their banks and, mixed with the mud, swept away the houses at the foot of the hills.

China - Prayers and donations to support vocations: the parishes of Beijing collect around 50 thousand euros for the diocesan Seminary

(9-5-23) On the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, in just one day, the parishes and chapels of the Archdiocese of Beijing have collected a total of 344,098.28 Yuan (equivalent to almost 50,000 euros) in donations for the diocesan Seminary of Beijing. In the letter of thanks, signed by all the students and teachers of the Seminary and addressed to Bishop Joseph Li Shan, to all the parish priests and lay faithful, it is emphasized that in the first repetition of the collection after a three-year break due to the pandemic, "we saw the same generosity, enthusiasm and faith and we are moved". Despite the difficulties, including financial ones, parish priests have worked intensely to promote the World Day of Prayer for Vocations and invited all baptized Catholics to meet the material needs related to the formation of seminarians, who in the future will be called to serve the communities. The Beijing Seminary in the course of forty years had trained 320 seminarians up to 2021, of whom 187 were ordained priests, and three were ordained bishops.

India - Inter-ethnic, non-religious clashes in Manipur: appeal and prayer for peace

(9-5-23) Deep sorrow and concern for the unrest and violence that took place in the state of Manipur, in northeastern India, and a heartfelt appeal for respect for human life and justice: this is expressed by the "United Christian Forum of North East India" (UCF), an ecumenical body, in the face of the inter-ethnic violence that has devastated the state in recent days and which subsided only after the intervention of the police and the establishment of a curfew. The first report of several days of large-scale violence reports arson, demolition of property and loss of life (about 58 dead), desecration of places of worship (including devastated Catholic churches and convents) and more than 7,500 people forced to leave their homes. The clashes see the majority ethnic group of the Meitei, mainly Hindu, against tribal communities (of various groups), the vast majority of whom are Christian.



Originally, there was the request of the Meitei community to obtain the "tribal status", which would allow them not only to benefit from the aid allocated to disadvantaged communities, but also to settle in the territories reserved for the tribals, which would then be severely damaged. They then organized a "tribal solidarity march" on May 3 that led them to confront the Meitei majority: hence the outbreak of widespread violence.

"We urge all parties involved to exercise restraint and work towards a peaceful resolution of the situation", wrote the UCF, which recalls that "Christians believe in the value of human life and in the importance of respecting the dignity of each individual". "We call on all members of society to refrain from violent acts and instead engage in peaceful dialogue to address their concerns," the UCF said.

Haiti - The population begins to take justice into their own hands against rampant violence and kidnappings

(9-5-23) "The Haitian population is rebelling against rampant violence and kidnappings at the hands of armed gangs", writes to Agenzia Fides Father Nestor Fils-Aimé, Provincial Superior of Canada for the Clerics of Saint Viator (CSV). "In a context of constitutional vacuum and judicial impunity, the population is reacting to try to remedy the many sufferings of years of violence. For two weeks - explains the missionary - fear on the Caribbean island has been replaced by reactions that

unfortunately are not always peaceful. To give a few examples, more than 200 bandits have recently been attacked, barricades have been built in several neighbourhoods and cars are being inspected to see if they carry weapons".

"Today, a military intervention would only benefit the government of Ariel Henri and his henchmen. We, Missionary Clerics of Saint Viator continue to live and share the suffering, but also the hope of the Haitian people," the CSV Provincial Superior said.

The social context on the Caribbean island has further deteriorated since the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021 and the population finds itself in a fight for justice and security.

Korean Church holds life concert for death penalty abolition

(9-5-23) A church-backed concert for life and peace called on the government to formulate a law to abolish the death penalty in South Korea.

The Sub-Committee on the Abolition of the Death Penalty of the Catholic bishops' Justice and Peace Committee organized the concert on the theme "Speaking of Peace, Singing for Life" at the Catholic Center in Myeongdong of the capital Seoul on April 28.

The event is among the regular annual programs by the committee which was suspended for four years due largely to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Vatican directs Indian Church to settle dispute

(9-5-23) A liturgical dispute that has been plaguing India's Eastern rite Syro-Malabar Church could be resolved soon, said officials after their Major Archbishop Cardinal George Alencherry and top officials returned from a visit to the Vatican this week.

Cardinal Alencherry and four members of the Church's Permanent Synod held detailed discussions with Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the secretary of state and Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti, the prefect of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches on May 4 to amicably settle the five-decade-long liturgy dispute. "We presented to them the situation in the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly. They listened to us and made an assessment of the situation. The results of the meeting will come in due course," Cardinal Alencherry said in a statement issued on May 8.

The top Vatican officials "gave appropriate directions to the Permanent Synod to move towards a lasting solution to the liturgy dispute in Ernakulam-Angamaly archdiocese during the meeting," Father Antony Vadakkera, the Syro-Malabar Church spokesman told UCA News on May 8.

The priest said the directions "will be disclosed to the public after meeting the synod."

He also said more reconciliatory measures would be adopted to settle the dispute rather than further aggravate or deepen wounds.

Myanmar Church prays for peace as junta airstrikes continue

(9-5-23) The officials in have organized a involving visits to churches conflict-stricken Southeast Priests and nuns were people during the visits to diocese that covers parts of on May 6. Kalay diocese is dioceses along with Kayah, among the 16 dioceses in Catholics from parishes



Myanmar's Kalay diocese pilgrimage programme and praying for peace in the Asian nation.

joined by hundreds of young seven churches in the Kalay Chin state and Sagaing region one of the worst affected Pekhon, Hakha, and Mandalay the country.

across the country have been

saying the rosary in May, the Marian month, and seeking Mary's intervention to bring peace to the troubled nation. In the evenings, dozens of parishioners go to the Marian grotto to say the rosary and make prayers for peace, according to the organizers.

“Despite gunfire almost daily, we continue our church celebrations and prayers for peace,” a local Catholic from Loikaw who doesn’t wish to be named told UCA News.

2 Indian priests arrested during raid on orphanage

(9-5-23) Two Catholic priests have been arrested in the central Indian Madhya Pradesh state for allegedly obstructing government officials when they came for a surprise raid of a Catholic orphanage. The priests were, however, released on bail by a court on May 8, hours after they were arrested for allegedly preventing the members of the state’s child rights panel during the raid on St. Francis Sevadham Orphanage in Shyampur in Sagar diocese.

“We were charged with false case after we objected to the inspection team, which wanted to climb on the altar,” said Father E. P. Joshy, youth director of Sagar diocese, who was picked up by the state police along with Father Naveen B. Father Joshy came to the campus of the orphanage following information that a team from the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, led by its chairperson Priyank Kanoongo, was conducting a flash raid. “The team besides inspecting the orphanage also searched the church, convent, presbytery, and two hostels of children,” the priest said.

“Father Naveen and I tried to tell them that the altar of a church for any Catholic is divine. But they climbed onto it and dismantled the holy objects,” the priest said. “They immediately summoned the police who thrashed us in front of everyone,” the priest lamented.

The inspection team forcefully took away a resident of the orphanage alleging complaints from his parents. However, they did not produce any documentary evidence to substantiate their claim, said Father Sinto Varghese, director of the orphanage. The team, according to orphanage officials, destroyed computers, CCTVs, mobile phones and important documents and has levelled conversion charges against the orphanage administration.

Violence in Myanmar to dominate ASEAN summit

(9-5-23) Junta-ruled Myanmar is set to dominate a meeting of Southeast Asian nations in Indonesia’s Labuan Bajo that started on 9 May, after an air strike on a village last month reportedly killed at least 170 people.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) -- long-decried by critics as a toothless talking shop -- has led diplomatic attempts to resolve the crisis.

10-5-23

Coptic prelate joins Pope to bless weekly audience



(10-5-23) Pope Francis was joined by Coptic Orthodox Pope Tawadros II at his regular weekly public audience on May 10, as the two prelates together blessed the crowd in St. Peter’s Square. Pope Francis set aside his regular catechetical address to talk about the visit by Pope Tawadros, who traveled to Rome to mark the 50th anniversary of a historic meeting between Pope Paul VI and the Coptic Pope Shenouda III. Pope Francis also recalled that Pope Tawadros had visited him exactly ten years ago, on May 10, shortly after his election to the papacy.

In his own remarks, the Coptic leader said that May 10 should be celebrated each year as a “Day of Coptic-Catholic Friendship.”

Leading Canadian bishops lament extension of euthanasia, assisted suicide to the mentally ill

(10-5-23) On March 17, 2024, mentally ill persons in Canada will become eligible for euthanasia and assisted suicide under the government’s medical assistance in dying (MAiD) regime.

On May 9, the Permanent Council of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops issued an open

letter to the Canadian government and a message to the Catholic faithful.

“Consistent with our strong objection to euthanasia/assisted suicide, we implore the federal government to heed the concerns voiced by many mental health experts, mental health and disability advocacy groups, communities, families, and individuals and to repeal entirely or permanently suspend the expansion of ‘MAiD’ to persons whose sole medical condition is a mental illness,” the bishops said in their letter to the government.

In their message to the faithful, the bishops encouraged “individual Catholics and their families, faith communities, Catholic healthcare professionals and any other people of good will to continue courageously and unwaveringly to witness to life, to tend to and accompany the sick, to resist pressure to support or participate in ‘MAiD,’ and to pray that our law makers may see the harm in what they are permitting to take place.”

War, unjust economic systems cause world hunger, Pope says

(10-5-23) At a May 10 audience with participants in a conference on “Food and Humanitarian Crises,” organized by the Pontifical Academy for Sciences, Pope Francis said that warfare, the Covid epidemic, and an unjust economic system have aggravated the problem of world hunger.

The Pope said that “we are also witnessing the decline of fraternal solidarity—this is a fact; wars and misery lead to the decline of fraternal solidarity.” He attributed this decline to “the selfish demands inherent in some current economic models.”

Pope Francis repeated his claim that an unnamed scholar had recently made the remarkable claim: “If weapons were not made for one year, world hunger would end.”

Most Americans favour making abortion pill available, poll shows

(10-5-23) Most Americans favour allowing the sale of the abortion drug mifepristone, according to a new *Washington Post*-ABC News poll.

The poll found that 66% of respondents said that the sale of mifepristone should be allowed, while 24% said the drug should not be on the market. The poll did not ask respondents whether the abortion pill should be available without prescription, which is the question at the centre of a current legal dispute.

Cardinal Parolin: Vatican wants the Church to have a normal presence in China

(10-5-23) Chinese Catholics from Beijing, Shanghai, and elsewhere donated statues of Venerable Matteo Ricci, SJ and the Servant of God Xu Guangqi to the cathedral in Ricci’s hometown of Macerata, Italy.

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Holy See’s Secretary of State, was the principal celebrant at a Mass at the cathedral on May 9. Cardinal Parolin described the gift as a “beautiful gesture of friendship” and said that China is a “country dear to the Holy See.”

“The Vatican is interested in the relationship with China because it wants to achieve a presence of the Catholic Church that is marked by normality,” he continued. “Matteo Ricci was a great friend of China, and we believe that through the method he adopted we can grow in friendship and mutual knowledge.”

Kerala bishops’ conference spokesman defends controversial film

(10-5-23) The bishops of the southwestern Indian state of Kerala have come to the defence of *The Kerala Story*, a film banned by the state of West Bengal because it was deemed offensive to Muslims.

The film is a “work of art” that “exposes the atrocities committed by the Islamic State,” said Father Jacob Palackappilly, spokesman for the Kerala Catholic Bishops’ Council. “There have been instances



of women's recruitment [into ISIS], trapping them in the web of love. The movie displays that, and it upsets many."

Vatican: Pope Francis at the General Audience together with Pope Tawadros: "the martyrs of the Coptic Church are also ours"

(10-5-23)"I pray that Christ will preserve you in full health and grant you the blessing of a long life". Thus the Coptic Orthodox Patriarch Tawadros II addressed Pope Francis, in his brief speech read in Arabic at the beginning of the General Audience held on Wednesday, May 10, in St. Peter's Square. The Primate of the Coptic Orthodox Church, who is visiting Rome with a delegation from Egypt to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the meeting in the Vatican between Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Shenuda III, was invited by Pope Francis to take part in the Wednesday Audience and to read his speech in front of the multitude gathered in a rain-soaked St. Peter's Square. In his speech, Pope Tawadros recalled the meeting between Pope Montini and Patriarch Shenuda, and also recalled the first meeting he had with Pope Francis during his previous visit to Rome, which took place exactly 10 years ago.

Pope Francis, speaking after Pope Tawadros, also recalled that he had invited the Coptic Patriarch to Rome "to celebrate with me the 50th anniversary of the historic meeting between Pope St. Paul VI and Pope Shenouda III in 1973. It was", recalled the Pontiff "the first meeting between a Bishop of Rome and a Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church, which culminated in the signing of a memorable joint Christological declaration, exactly on May 10". "In remembrance of this event, His Holiness Tawadros came to see me for the first time on May 10 ten years ago, a few months after his election and mine, and proposed to celebrate every May 10 the "Coptic-Catholic Friendship Day" that we have been celebrating since then.

We call each other on the phone, we send each other greetings and we remain good brothers, we have not quarreled!". Pope Francis thanked the Coptic Patriarch "for his commitment to the growing friendship between the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church", and also recalled "the martyrs of the Coptic Church, who are also ours" recalling in particular "the martyrs of the Libyan beach, who became martyrs a few years ago". Due to the adverse weather conditions, Pope Francis decided to postpone the reading of the Catechesis dedicated to St. Francis Xavier, Patron Saint of Catholic missions, to the next General Audience.

Ethiopia - Humanitarian aid to Tigray suspended, more than 500 schools remain closed



(10-5-23) Students in the northern region of Ethiopia have been unable to attend school regularly for three years. Specifically in the western, southern and northeastern parts of Tigray schools remain closed because the areas are still under occupation by Eritrean and Amhara forces.

85% of schools have suffered partial or total damage as a result of the war. More than 22,500 teachers in the region have not been paid for more than two years. Millions of children have dropped out of school, first because of the coronavirus epidemic and then

because of the war.

The World Food Program has suspended the distribution of humanitarian aid "until further notice" due to the discovery of large-scale theft of relief food and its sale in local markets. For the same reason, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has also suspended aid funding. According to USAID, "the warring parties agreed years ago to steal food through a 'criminal network' created as a result of the ceasefire last November.

Kenya - Number of bodies found in the Shakahola forest rises to 133; the President creates a task force to review the law that regulates worship

(10-5-23) Another twenty bodies have been recovered in the Shakahola forest, in south-eastern Kenya, bringing to 133 the number of followers killed in collective suicide by forced fasting (but some of the bodies show signs of strangulation or asphyxiation suggesting homicide), ordered by the "preacher" Paul Nthenge Mackenzie, head of the Good News International Church". Some 65 people found fasting in the forest were rescued and taken to hospital. Bad weather has forced the search operations to be suspended.

On May 4, President William Samoei Arap Ruto created a special "presidential task force" to review the law that regulates worship in Kenya, the Legal and Regulatory Framework Governing Religious Organizations in Kenya.

Holy Land - Air raids on Gaza, massacre of women and children. Father Romanelli: "May the Lord change everyone's hearts"

(10-5-23) The situation is terrible. The raids, according to the latest news, have caused at least 17 deaths, and more than twenty injuries, in addition to those who were the targets of the attacks. Most of the victims are women and children". Father Gabriel Romanelli, parish priest of the Catholic church of the Holy Family, told Fides the heartbreaking pain and shock caused by a new massacre caused by the bombing of Gaza. In the early hours of Tuesday, May 9, dozens of Israeli fighters bombed houses and buildings where three leaders of Islamic Jihad reside. Another raid was carried out on Tuesday afternoon, causing more deaths. At least four women and four children died under the bombs. "In one of the buildings attacked", reports Father Gabriel, "lived a Muslim girl who attends our Christian school. She is fine, but the attack has killed her father, who was a good doctor, dentist, and was not involved in political activism. His mother and a brother, who was also a doctor, have also died."

Faced with the blood shed in the umpteenth tragic days in Gaza, Father Gabriel repeated that "prayer is something real, not abstract, and it is up to us to pray more insistently for peace."Six million people have no status," he laments, "The logic of violence for violence's sake seems to prevail everywhere."

India - Appointment of Bishop of Balasore

(10-5-23) The Holy Father Francis has appointed Bishop Varghese Thottamkara, C.M., currently titular bishop of Cullu and apostolic vicar of Nekemte in Ethiopia as Bishop of Balasore (India).

Chinese officials stress sinicization during Shanghai church visit

(10-5-23) Regional officials of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) visited Shanghai diocese on May 8 to study the local Church's progress on the implementation of socialist policies, a month after China installed a new bishop there without Vatican approval.

Shanghai's newly installed Bishop Joseph Shen Bin welcomed three officials of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in the diocese. They also jointly unveiled a studio the diocese built, a report on the Shanghai diocesan website said.

Shen briefed the officials on the current situation of Shanghai diocese and efforts to implement the CCP's sinicization policy, the report said.

China's exit ban on activists, dissidents triggers uproar

(10-5-23) An outspoken retired victim of China's controversial exit "political persecution" in retaliation for communist regime's policies, says a Guo Yuhua, a former professor of University, and her husband were border security personnel in Shenzhen possessing a valid travel permit, reported on May 8. Beijing-based independent journalist, Gao Yu, said Guo was not allowed to leave



professor became the latest ban which critics termed as her criticism of the report.

sociology at Tsinghua denied permission by to visit Hong Kong despite Radio Free Asia (RFA)

to visit Hong Kong despite Radio Free Asia (RFA)

and was stopped at the border. "When she [Guo] asked why, they showed her a document issued by the Beijing municipal police department placing an exit ban on her," Gao said.

Guo was among a group of high-profile individuals who signed an open letter in October 2020 calling for the release of Geng Xiaonan. Geng was jailed for three years in February 2021 on charges of "illegal business operations" after she publicly supported Tsinghua alumni and dissident Xu Zhangrun.

Myanmar violence 'deep concern' for ASEAN leaders

(10-5-23) Southeast Asian nations said on 10 May they are "deeply concerned" about the violence ravaging Myanmar, and condemned a recent attack on a convoy of diplomats delivering humanitarian aid in the country.

Turmoil in junta-ruled Myanmar has dominated talks at this week's Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in Indonesia, as the regional bloc faces criticism for its perceived inaction. ASEAN has led diplomatic attempts to resolve the festering crisis, but its efforts so far have failed to stem the bloodshed unleashed by a military coup in 2021.

11-5-23

Papal theme for World Day of Migrants: freedom to leave or stay

(11-5-23) In his message for the 109th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Pope Francis chose the theme: "Free to choose, whether to migrate or to stay."

The freedom of migrate should be coupled with a freedom to remain in one's native land, the Pope said in his message, released by the Vatican on May 11. He lamented: "Conflicts, natural disasters, or more simply the impossibility of living a dignified and prosperous life in one's native land," have forced many to leave their homes.

To enable people to continue living in their native lands, the Pope said, world leaders must end warfare and exploitation. He said: "We need to make every effort to halt the arms race, economic colonialism, the plundering of other people's resources, and the devastation of our common home."

Son of jailed Hong Kong activist, US congressman slam UK, Vatican over human rights weakness

Referring to jailed Hong Kong democracy advocate Jimmy Lai, Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-WI) said on May 10 that "the silence from the Vatican on China's human rights abuses and Jimmy's case, in particular, is deafening."

Rep. Gallagher, a Catholic, is chairman of the House's Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party.

Vatican finance inspector received 128 suspicious activity reports in 2022

The Vatican's Supervisory and Financial Information Authority (ASIF), which is charged with the task of combating combat money laundering and terrorist financing, as well as conducting financial intelligence, received 128 reports of suspicious activities in 2022.

ASIF released its 2022 annual report on May 10 (Vatican news summary). According to its annual reports, reports of suspicious activity have varied widely over the years but have risen steadily since 2019.

At times, ASIF has quietly revised the number of suspicious activity reports in a given year in subsequent annual reports—raising questions about the reliability of the data upon initial publication. For example, in 2018, there were 56 reports of suspicious activity (according to the 2018 annual report), later revised to 54 reports (in the 2019 annual report), and still later revised to 83 reports (in subsequent annual reports).

According to the 2022 annual report, 124 of the 128 suspicious activity reports came from the IOR (the Institute for the Works of Religion, or Vatican Bank). The annual report notes that "a total of 19 reports" (presumably of the 128) "were submitted to the Office of the Promoter of Justice" (Vatican City prosecutor).

Founded by Pope Benedict XVI in 2010 as the Financial Information Authority (FIA, or AIF), the agency was renamed and given new statutes in 2020. It has been led by its current president, Carmelo Barbagallo, since 2019; its previous president, René Brülhart, was charged by Vatican prosecutors with abuse of office.



Charitable works begin with God's love, Pope tells Caritas delegates

(11-5-23) In a May 11 address to delegates from Caritas International, Pope Francis said that the work of the international charitable consortium is “not just a matter of initiating projects and strategies that prove successful and effective, but also of engaging in an ongoing process of missionary conversion.”

The Pope encouraged the Caritas delegates to focus on the source of their works, which is God's love, “precisely because the identity of Caritas Internationalis depends directly on the mission it has received.”

Although he did not refer directly to the tensions that have troubled Caritas International—and led to the Vatican's removal of top management last year—he did stress the importance of working with an attitude of charity, and his words could easily apply to the Caritas delegates' task of choosing new leadership. To identify the spirit of charity in workers, he suggested, “look closely to see if they are willing to help freely, with a smile on their face, without grumbling or getting annoyed.”

World Council of Churches, Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity hold leadership meeting

(11-5-23) 350 Protestant and Orthodox communities are members of the World Council of Churches, which is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland. Pope Francis made an ecumenical pilgrimage to Geneva in 2018 for the body's 70th anniversary.

Pontifical abuse commission announces global and regional 'resource people'

(11-5-23) At its May meeting, the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, led by Cardinal Seán O'Malley (president) and Father Andrew Small, OMI (secretary), published a personnel chart that includes a director of policy, a policy associate, four regional experts, two regional senior advisors, and a regional consultant.

South Sudan - Church structures mobilized to welcome people fleeing fighting in Sudan

(11-5-23) Mobilize religious congregations present in the Archdiocese of Juba, capital of South Sudan, to welcome people fleeing the war between the army and paramilitaries in Sudan. This is what Archbishop. Stephen Ameyu Martin of Juba, has asked the religious congregations present in the Archdiocese.

Violent clashes between the army and the RDF (Rapid Support Forces) paramilitaries spare no one. Among those fleeing are also men and women religious from various congregations present in Sudan "With the letter I addressed to all the religious communities here in the archdiocese, I indicated that at least we all open our houses to our brothers and sisters who are in Sudan, from the Mill Hill missionaries to the White Fathers and the Sisters of the Sacred Heart", Archbishop Martin said during a meeting with religious leaders.

China - An unusual pilgrimage: to discover Father Matteo Ricci's testimony of faith

(11-5-23) "Retracing Matteo Ricci's journey, from Zhaoqing to Beijing, has touched us deeply. Along the way, we have marveled many times at the signs and memories that have reminded us of his perseverance, his wisdom and his missionary passion". Father Peter Zhao, vicar of the Archdiocese of Beijing, warmly recounts to Fides the astonishment and inner consolation that accompanied the singular itinerant experience he shared with a group of young Catholics between the end of April and the first week of May: a pilgrimage to the places visited during his adventure in China by the great

Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci, today declared Venerable by Pope Francis, in view of the anniversary of his death (which took place in Beijing exactly 413 years ago, on May 11, 1610).

Ghana - Interreligious dialogue, education, evangelization in the Kingdom of Ashanti



(11-5-23) Evangelization, formation, health care and interreligious dialogue are at the heart of the activities of the priests of the Society for African Missions in the ancient kingdom of Ashanti. The missionaries worked tirelessly to improve people's lives and spread the message of Christianity to this ancient people. "The Kingdom of Ashanti is one of the most powerful and influential pre-colonial states in West Africa, whose capital is Kumasi," reports Father K. René D. Yao, SMA to Fides. Since its founding in 1856, the SMA has established missions in different parts of Africa, including the Kingdom of Ashanti in Ghana and doing evangelization, education and health services.

Activist gets jail for criticising communist govt in Vietnam

(11-5-23) A rights activist who campaigned against the communist government's injustices and the Chinese invasion of Vietnam's sea has been sentenced to jail in Vietnam. The People's Court in Ho Chi Minh City on May 12 handed down an eight-year jail sentence to Tran Van Bang for "making, storing, disseminating or propagandizing information, materials and products that aim to oppose" the Republic of Vietnam," according to the state-owned *Tuoi Tre* newspaper. The paper said Bang, 62, wrote and posted 39 articles with contents that slander the government and propagate misinformation, causing confusion among people. He expressed hatred and discontent towards communist leaders, the paper further alleged.

Indian orphanage alleges ulterior motive behind recent raids

(11-5-23) A Catholic orphanage in central India continues to face government ire with allegations of conversion and motivated inspections, making its functioning impossible, say Church officials. "It has become very difficult to run our institution as government agencies meant to protect us are after us by implicating us in false and baseless cases," said Father Sinto Varghese, director of the St. Francis Sevadham Orphanage in Madhya Pradesh state's Sagar diocese. The century-old orphanage has been facing problems since 2020 when it applied to renew its operational license. The state did not respond to the renewal application. However, federal and state panels empowered to protect child rights continue to inspect the orphanage, the priest said. In the latest action, the district Child Welfare Committee (CWC) on May 10 ordered the orphanage to move all its 26 children to two government-aided facilities within 24 hours. But within a day, on May 11, it amended its own order and asked the orphanage to improve its facilities. It followed a May 8 inspection. The inspection and the subsequent actions "were in gross violation of an order from Madhya Pradesh High Court," Varghese told UCA News on May 11. He said the court had already banned moving children from the orphanage. The priest filed a contempt of court case before the Jabalpur bench of the state on May 9 against child rights panel officials who carried out the "illegal surprise inspection on May 8."

The court has accepted his plea case and directed him to make the officials a party to his complaint. In January 2022, the court restrained the child rights panel from moving the inmates from the orphanage to another facility and banned it from undertaking surprise inspections without prior intimation as per the law, said the priest.

In its last raid on May 8, the panel, under the leadership of Priyank Kanoongo, chairperson of the federal Commission for Protection of Child Rights and other provincial officials, on the pretext of

inspecting the orphanage, desecrated the altar of a church and took away sacramental wine, prayer materials and other holy objects, Father Varghese said. They also entered the convent and searched the private quarters of nuns and leveled false allegations of conversion, the priest added. Two priests were arrested and were later released by a local court, he said.

“The inspection and the order to move the children and cancellation of it are all part of the strategy to harass us,” said Father Varghese. Diocesan officials have moved the court to get the license renewed, and that petition is pending before the court.

The orphanage is located on a prime 277-acre plot of land granted to the Church during the British colonial era. According to Church officials, some people are trying to seize the property, backed by pro-Hindu groups and government officials.

Christians suffer as unrest grips Pakistan

(11-5-23) Christian institutions were closed while ordinary Christians suffered amid chaotic scenes in Pakistan following the arrest of former Prime Minister Imran Khan.

The South Asian nation has been in turmoil ever since the arrest of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party leader on May 9 by paramilitary rangers outside the High Court in the national capital Islamabad. Local media have reported at least eight deaths amid countrywide demonstrations.

As the chaos unfolded, Pastor Irfan James, a missionary, had to cut short his mission tour and take refuge in the house of a Christian family in Hangu, a hotbed of Taliban and al Qaeda-linked militants in the northwestern region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa bordering Afghanistan.

According to Asher Javed, chief executive of the Catholic Board of Education, Church-run schools were also closed on May 11 for at least a week in Lahore, Faisalabad and Rawalpindi dioceses.

Church institutions in Lahore including the social communications commission and WAVE studio, the Church’s national audiovisual center, are also closed.

Coptic Orthodox martyrs slain by ISIS to be added to *Roman Martyrology*, Pope Francis tells Coptic Pope

(11-5-23) In a significant ecumenical gesture, Pope Francis said on May 11 that the 21 Coptic Orthodox Christians beheaded by members of the Islamic State in Libya in 2015 will be added to the *Roman Martyrology*, the list of saints and blessed commemorated in the Roman Rite of the Catholic Church.

The Pontiff made the announcement during a meeting with Pope Tawadros II of Alexandria, the head of the Coptic Orthodox Church, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the historic meeting of their predecessors, Pope St. Paul VI and Pope Shenouda III. The Coptic Orthodox Church is among the Oriental Orthodox churches that ceased to be in full communion with the Holy See following the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451.

On the previous day, May 10, Pope Tawadros had joined Pope Francis in blessing the weekly general audience in St. Peter’s Square.

“In this journey of friendship we are also accompanied by the martyrs, who testify that ‘no one has greater love than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends’ (Jn 15:13),” Pope Francis said at the conclusion of his May 11 address to Pope Tawadros. “I have no words to express my gratitude for the precious gift of a relic of the Coptic martyrs killed in Libya on 15 February 2015.”

Pope Francis added:

These martyrs were baptized not only in water and the Spirit, but also in blood, with a blood that is a seed of unity for all followers of Christ. I am pleased to announce today that, with Your Holiness’ consent, these twenty-one martyrs will be included in the Roman Martyrology as a sign of the spiritual communion uniting our two Churches.

May the prayers of the Coptic martyrs, united with those of the Theotokos, continue to make our Churches grow in friendship, until the blessed day when we will be able to celebrate together at the same altar and commune with the same Body and Blood of the Saviour, “that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21)!



Missionary work is not humanitarianism or proselytism, Pope tells Italian missionaries

(11-5-23) On May 11, Pope Francis addressed members of the Conference of Missionary Institutes in Italy. The early Christians drew “inspiration and vigour” from “the witness of life, the preaching of the Word, catechesis and the celebration of the Sacraments,” Pope Francis said. “Let this also be your style. It is not a matter of proselytizing, this is not Christian, no; the style is this: proclaim Christ first of all with the testimony of life.”

“And the Church is not interested in providing welfare: helping, yes, but first of all, evangelizing, bearing witness: if you give assistance, let it come from witnessing, not from proselytizing methods,” he added.

(In a 2007 doctrinal note, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith stated that “the term proselytism was often used as a synonym for missionary activity. More recently, however, the term has taken on a negative connotation, to mean the promotion of a religion by using means, and for motives, contrary to the spirit of the Gospel; that is, which do not safeguard the freedom and dignity of the human person.”)

Working document approved for October Synod session

(11-5-23) The general secretariat of the Synod of Bishops has approved the *instrumentum laboris*, the working document that will form the basis for discussion at the October meeting of the Synod. The *instrumentum laboris*, reflecting the results of preparatory Synod meetings at the local, diocesan, and continental levels, will be made public in early June, the Vatican announced.

Hong Kong bishop: Pope wants to build bridges to China



(11-5-23) Hong Kong's Bishop Stephen Chow, who recently returned from a visit to the mainland, disclosed that Pope Francis wanted him to lead a “bridge church” to unite Chinese Catholics.

Bishop Chow, in an interview with Father Anthony Spadaro of *Civiltà Cattolica* said that the mission of the Church in Hong Kong is “to connect the different and opposing sides, to help them see themselves as human persons eager to be heard and understood.”

Bishop Chow said that the secret Vatican deal with China, governing the appointment of new bishops, “is not dead as some seem to have suggested.” But he conceded that “the discrepancies of views between the two sides on the assignment of bishops to other dioceses could be a factor to be better understood.” He suggested that further talks could resolve the difficulties.

The Hong Kong bishop also avoided questions about the impact of the Beijing regime's drive to “Sinicize” the Catholic Church. He said: “I think it is better not to jump to conclusions about sinicization for now.”

Filipino Catholics oppose LGBTQ topics in curriculum

(11-5-23) The executive secretary of the Philippine bishops' Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education spoke out against the Philippine government's inclusion of LGBTQ topics in a draft revision to the nation's high school curriculum.

“It remains contrary to law, good customs, morals, and public policy,” added Michael Israel, president of the Catholic Youth for Christ.

12-5-23

Having children reflects hope for future, Pope says

(12-5-23) Speaking on May 12 to a Roman conference on declining birth rates, Pope Francis said that “the birth of children is the main indicator for measuring the hope of a people.”

Enlarging on that theme, the Pontiff said that “starting a family is turning into a titanic effort.” He observed that young couples feel more anxiety, and many are “settling for mediocre substitutes:

making money, aiming for a career, traveling, jealously guarding leisure time.” He said that wars, climate change, and environmental degradation, as well as economic factors, aggravate the problem. Italy’s Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni also attended the conference, reflecting her government’s concern about the “birth dearth.”

UK birth of ‘three-parent baby’ came at a high moral cost, Catholic bioethicists warn

(12-5-23) “This is the destruction of two embryonic human individuals to create a third individual,” the Anscombe Bioethics Centre said of the IVF (in vitro fertilization) procedure known as mitochondrial donation. “This is primarily unethical due to the destruction of two unique innocent human beings, who had inherent dignity and rights.”

Catholic teaching on IVF is discussed in *Donum Vitae* (1987) and *Dignitas Personae* (2008), two documents of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Catholic environmental network urges Panama to reject mining deal

(12-5-23) In March, representatives of organizations of Latin American bishops, religious institutes, and Caritas agencies held the first meeting of the Red Eclesial Ecológica Mesoamericana (REMAM, or Mesoamerican Ecclesial Ecological Network).

REMAM has urged Panama’s National Assembly to reject a government deal with a subsidiary of a Canadian copper company.

Ethiopia - The Eparch of Adigrat: the impact of the crisis in Tigray also affects pastoral service programs

(12-5-23) Famine, cities and homes looted, hospitals destroyed, businesses razed to the ground, sacred places desecrated, rapes. The people of Tigray have been suffering unimaginable suffering for almost three years. Only a few days ago, the United States Agency for International Development announced the temporary suspension of humanitarian aid due to thefts and general insecurity. Almost all of Tigray’s 6 million inhabitants depend on food aid, after two years of civil war and government-imposed restrictions on humanitarian aid that have pushed parts of the region to the brink of famine.

"I pray for the Tigrinyan population and also for an end to the atrocious violence and suffering underway in other regions of the country", writes to Fides Tesfaselassie Medhin, bishop of the Catholic eparchy of Adigrat. "I always trust in a serious concerted, public, unequivocal voice and an appeal from all religious leaders, for peaceful pressure to be exerted on all decision-makers in any context of emergency and precariousness".



Philippines - Our Lady of Consolation on pilgrimage in the country: deep Marian devotion

(12-5-23) Our Lady of Consolation visits neighborhoods and buildings in the city of Manila, as well as throughout the country, to bring a message of hope, peace, support and comfort to the poor and oppressed, to the suffering, to the desperate and to all those who rely on her intercession. During the month of May, the traditional "Marian month", in which the devotion of the Filipino faithful to the Virgin Mary is strongly manifested, the Shrine of St. Augustine, located in the historic district of "Intramuros" in Manila - the oldest area, where there are buildings, works and remains of Spanish colonization - organized a special pilgrimage of Our Lady of Consolation in the diocese and throughout the nation.

The image of the Virgin was presented and blessed during the first congress of shrines of the Archdiocese of Manila, which was held on May 1. Father Edwin Hari, an Augustinian priest and rector of the shrine said: “We wish to extend the practice of the "coronilla" prayer, a crown of invocations to the Mother of Consolation, in which the Virgin is invoked in a special way as comforter of the afflicted.”

Indian pastor, 4 others get bail in conversion case

(12-5-23) Five people, including a pastor, have been released after a court in northern India granted them bail in a case where they stand accused of violating a stringent state anti-conversion law. "It is true we have got the anticipatory bail under severe conditions," Pastor Dinesh Kumar told UCA News on May 10.

They were picked up on Feb. 12 during a prayer gathering in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, ruled by the pro-Hindu party since 2017. Later, a separate case under the provisions of the anti-conversion law was slapped on them. Narrating the incident that led to his arrest in February, Pastor Kumar said the police along with right-wing Hindu activists barged into his house and detained 16 persons, including three women. They also took away copies of the Bible, and damaged the music system among other things at home, he lamented.

Though he was released on jail four days after his arrest on Feb. 12, the police registered another case under the anti-conversion law, accusing five of them of converting many persons to Christianity.

China demands 'total loyalty' from state-run churches

(12-5-23) Leaders of two pro-government Christian groups in southeast China organized a conference with the aim to strengthen the re-evaluation of state-controlled churches and control of religious clergy on annual inspection and license renewal for the clergy.

The conference in mid-April by the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and Fujian Christian Council at the Fujian Theological Seminary insisted on efforts and activities by church groups and clergy based on social principles of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and direction for religious groups by President Xi Jinping, ChinaAid reported on May 10.

ChinaAid reported that the primary aim of the annual inspection is "to reinforce their [CCP] ideology on religious clergy to better serve Communism." Political loyalty is above all else, so annual inspections also operate as an excuse to remove the unqualified "dissidents" – religious clergy who are evaluated as "not patriotic enough," the report said.

The US-based rights group, Open Doors, ranks China among the 50 countries where it is most dangerous to be a Christian.



German missionary honoured in Indonesia

(12-5-23) An art institute in Indonesia has honoured a German-born Jesuit missionary for his dedication to the country's music.

The 85-year-old Father Karl-Edmund Prier who pioneered inculturation in liturgical music, is one of the two recipients of an honorary doctorate (*doctor honoris causa*) from the Yogyakarta Institute of the Arts on May 11, along with Professor Gunnar Spellmeyer, an expert in architecture.

Timbul Raharjo, the rector of the institute said it is a form of appreciation for their contributions. Father Prier contributed greatly to the field of music science, especially liturgical music, he said. Raharjo praised the priest's dedication to the institute where he taught the history of music and review of music repertoire among other subjects for 33 years from 1971 to 2004. He called the priest a person who "loved Indonesia very much." Father Prier made an effort to deepen his appreciation for regional music by traveling around the archipelago.

In a speech entitled 'Life for Music,' Father Prier recounted his efforts to integrate Church music with the Indonesian culture, through the Liturgical Music Centre, which he founded in 1971 with Paul Widyanan, an Indonesian Catholic composer.

Manipur violence hits Hindu zealots-Church in India's Kerala

(12-5-23 Hindu) The Hindu) The relationship between the Hindu fundamentalist Bharatiya Janata Party and the Catholic Church in the southern Indian Kerala state, which was smooth for sometime, appears to be on an inexorable decline now.

The raging attacks against Christians in Manipur and other States have caught the Catholic Church here in a bind. "People are having second thoughts as evident from an unending series of questions posed by our counterparts in the north and north east," noted a senior functionary of the Syro-Malabar Church in Kerala.

13-5-23

Fundamentalist Hindu party trounced in Indian state election

(13-5-23) The winning of 139 of the Karnataka State Assembly seats by the Congress Party against the Hindu fundamentalist Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) tally of 65 was a clear sign that Pro-Hindu party's honeymoon in the south of the country is over – giving a sigh of relief to the religious minorities of Muslims and Christians. To many it is a win for the "Hijab" which the BJP government banned in educational institutions which led many Muslim girls to forego government exams and for the elimination of the election-promise of cancelling of the 4% quota in government budget for the development of Muslims under minorities rights – to cite only two examples. Archbishop Peter Machado of Bangalore, the state's capital, has filed a case in the Supreme Court against the pro-Hindu government for its complicity in the persecution of Christians.

The religious minorities hope that the new government will prove to be really 'secular' as the country's Constitution guarantees and that they will enjoy freedom to profess, practise and propagate their religion and that they can continue their services in the educational, medical and social fields unhindered.

Iraq - Christians take to the streets for a "garrison of solidarity" after the attacks on Chaldean Patriarch Sako

(13-5-23) On the evening of Friday 12 May, more than two hundred Christians, including priests and nuns, gathered in Tahrir Square, in the centre of Baghdad, to demonstrate their solidarity with Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako, Patriarch of the Chaldean Church, who in recent weeks has become the target of smear campaigns via social media. The "garrison of solidarity" held Iraqi flags, candles, olive branches and banners with writings asking the authorities to intervene to ensure that the polling stations reserved for Christians in the Iraqi Parliament are not effectively cornered by groups linked to major parties. The participants also prayed and repeated slogans in support of social peace and unity among Christians. The gathering itself - Iraqi sources such as the information site ankawa.com report - was disturbed by the arrival of an organized group of people who came to shout and shout offensive slogans against Patriarch Sako. After about half an hour, the "garrison of solidarity" was dissolved and the participants left the square.

The episode in Tahrir Square comes after the clash and controversy around the increasingly controversial issue of the "quotas" of parliamentary seats reserved for minority members of the Iraqi population has rekindled in recent weeks. But non-Christians can vote to assign the 5 seats which in theory should be reserved for the Christian component. In this way, the majority political forces are also able to steer the allocation of seats reserved for minority components, including Christians.

In this complex situations, the Shiite and Kurdish groups also play a part for a decisive vote.

Some bishops even went to the extent of getting to boycott elections. On Monday 8 May, in an interview with a television station in Iraqi Kurdistan, Iraqi Cardinal Sako had also mentioned the possibility of having recourse to international justice bodies to protect the correct and non-manipulated distribution of the quota of parliamentary seats reserved for Iraqi Christians.

In recent weeks, denigration and attacks directed at the Patriarch by subjects linked to the "Babylon Movement" have taken on increasingly harsh tones.

Pope receives Ukrainian President

(13-5-23) Pope Francis received on Saturday evening in private audience Volodymyr Zelensky, President of Ukraine. The two leaders spent time in conversation aided by a translator, Fr Marko Gongalo, a Polish priest who works at the Secretariat of State.



The meeting, which lasted some 40 minutes, focused on the humanitarian and political situation in Ukraine following the war. They agreed on the ongoing requirement to continue providing humanitarian aid to the population, and the Pope highlighted, in particular, the need for "gestures of humanity" towards the most fragile, the innocent victims of the conflict."

As is customary, the two leaders exchanged gifts. Pope Francis gave President Zelensky a bronze sculpture representing an olive branch, a symbol of peace. He also gifted him with the 2019 *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* penned by the Pope and the Grand Imam of Al-Ahzar, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb; a book on the *Statio Orbis* of 27 March 2020 and a volume entitled "An Encyclical on Peace in Ukraine."

On his part, the Ukrainian President brought the Holy Father a work of art crafted from a bulletproof plate and a painting entitled "Loss" on the killing of children during conflict.

14-5-23

Pope at Regina Coeli: Holy Spirit corrects and defends us

(14-5-23) Pope Francis prayed the traditional Eastertide Marian prayer of the Regina Coeli on Sunday with pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square.

In his reflections at the Regina Coeli prayer on the Gospel for the 6th Sunday of Easter, Pope Francis noted that Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the "Paraclete", which means both "consoler and advocate at the same time."

"This means that the Holy Spirit does not leave us alone," said the Holy Father. "He is near to us, like an advocate who assists the accused person, standing by his or her side."

And because God's Spirit loves us, He acts as a true and faithful friend, who brings us God's pardon and strength while also correcting us when we make mistakes.

The Pope went on to reflect on the second aspect of the Holy Spirit: His action as our "advocate". The Paraclete defends us from those who accuse us, and even "from ourselves when we do not appreciate and forgive ourselves". The Spirit also stands by our side when the world seeks to push us aside or when the devil—the "accuser *par excellence*"—tries to make us feel useless and unhappy. Pope Francis invited Christians to call upon the Holy Spirit and to pray to Him often, especially since He is always within us.

Pope after the Regina Coeli: Mother's Day, an appeal for peace in the Holy Land

(14-5-23) Pope Francis encouraged everyone to gratefully recall their mothers on Sunday. Mother's Day is celebrated in many countries on the second Sunday in May.



"May weapons be silenced, because arms can never obtain security and stability. Rather, they only succeed in destroying any hope for peace." Pope Francis launched that appeal on Sunday, as he prayed for peace in the Holy Land. Israel and Islamic Jihad militants in the Gaza Strip have traded blows since Tuesday 9 May, when an Israeli air strike killed three of the group's top commanders. An Egyptian-brokered ceasefire came into effect on Saturday, and appeared to be holding on Sunday.
