

## CATHOLIC WORLD LAST WEEK

(CWLW)

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27-2-23

### **Nicaragua's Ortega steps up attacks on Church**

(27-2-23) Nicaragua's President Daniel Ortega has outlawed public processions at Catholic parishes during Lent and the Easter season, as he escalates his campaign against the Church.

Last week the Nicaraguan strongman accused the country's Catholic bishops of "grave crimes and horrors" against the country, charging that the hierarchy supported the old Somoza regime. He also claimed that the Vatican had supported Mussolini in World War II, and was now a "mafia organization."



### **'Sing as a choir,' Pope tells Rome's pontifical universities**

(27-2-23) On February 25, Pope Francis addressed the professors, students and staff of the Roman pontifical universities and institutions.

A university is "not the school of uniformity: no, it is the accord and consonance of different voices and instruments," the Pope said. "St. John Henry Newman describes it as the place where different forms of knowledge and perspectives are expressed in symphony, they complete each other, they correct each other, and they balance each other out."

### **Pope calls on Vatican City State Tribunal to 'find the necessary balance between justice and mercy'**

(27-2-23) On February 25, Pope Francis spoke at the inauguration of the 94th judicial year of Vatican City State Tribunal.

The Pontiff observed that in recent years, "legal disputes and related trials have increased, as has, in not a few cases, the seriousness of the conduct that comes to light, especially in the area of asset and financial management."

"With [an] attitude of mercy and closeness we are required to look at our brothers and sisters, especially when they are in difficulty, when they err, when they are subjected to the trial of justice, a trial that is at times necessary, when it comes to ascertaining conduct that tarnishes the face of the Church and provokes scandal in the community of the faithful." the Pontiff told the judges in the Vatican financial trial.

The Pope asked the judges to exercise "rigorous discernment," which "prevents a cold bureaucratic morality in dealing with more sensitive issues," and to have "prudent recourse to the canon of equity," which "can help to find the necessary balance between justice and mercy."

### **Pope to visit Hungary in April**

(27-2-23) Pope Francis will visit Hungary in April, the Vatican has announced.

The trip—the 41st foreign journey of his pontificate—will take the Pope to Budapest from April 28 to 30. There he will meet civic leaders, the poor and migrants, and the local Catholic community.

The Pope's meeting with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban will be carefully watched. Orban has been a leading opponent of mass immigration, but Hungary has opened its doors to many thousands of refugees from the war in Ukraine. Orban has also split with many other European leaders by declining to throw his support to Ukraine in that conflict.

### **Soldiers invade archbishop's residence in Democratic Republic of Congo**

(27-2-23) Church officials in the Democratic Republic of Congo are demanding an explanation after soldiers forced their way onto the grounds of the cathedral and archbishop's residence of the Archdiocese of Lubumbashi on February 25.

An armed convoy from the Republican Guard pushed past archdiocesan security officers, demanding to see Archbishop Fulgence Muteba Mugalu. Military spokesmen said that the troops were making security arrangements for a future visit. Church officials said they were not informed of any such plan, and characterized the soldiers' actions as "unjustified intimidation."

### **Spiritual exercises for Roman Curia begin**

(27-2-23) The annual spiritual exercises for members of the Roman Curia began on February 26 and will conclude on March 3. Rather than naming a retreat master, the Pope asked the members of the Curia to undertake their retreat privately this year, "in a personal way, suspending work activities and gathering themselves in prayer."

### **India tries to police religious conversions (Wall Street Journal)**

(27-2-23) "In some [Indian] states, if you want to change faiths, you have to inform a magistrate in advance," Tunku Varadarajan, a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, notes in the *Wall Street Journal*. "Citizens who suspect that a 'wrongful' conversion has taken place can file a complaint with the police."

"Astonishingly, the burden of proof 'lies on the person who has caused the conversion' —to quote language, common to many of these laws, from the Karnataka state statute," Varadarajan adds. "Punishments include jail terms of up to five years."



### **Ethiopia - Psychological assistance, schools, food for 7 million people: Salesian missionaries always on the front line**

(27-2-23) "Sending humanitarian aid to Tigray has become easier and we continue to assist people who have been affected by the two years of conflict", wrote Father Abba Hailemariam Medhin, Superior of the Salesian Province of Africa-Ethiopia (AET) about the Congregation's recent interventions in the northern region of Ethiopia. "People are still in need of food and non-food items. We are slowly resuming

counseling services and reopening educational centres, but most of all people need food and health services."

There are still almost 7 million Tigrayans in need of help. As reported by Salesian Missions, although the peace agreement has been signed and many services have been restored, there are still many needs. Banks are open but people still do not have access to their accounts.

The support of Salesian missionaries in the region has been constant, compatibly with government provisions. In Tigray there are 25 engaged in serving more than 5,000 minors and youth in educational centers of all levels, technical institutes, youth centers and parishes.

### **DR Congo - "We await clarification on the invasion of the Archbishopric by the Republican Guard"**

(27-2-23) "We demand clarifications from the military hierarchy that raided the archbishopric and cathedral", says a statement from the Archdiocese of Lubumbashi where on the morning of Friday February 24, a team of soldiers from the Republican Guard forcefully entered the enclosure of the archbishopric and the cathedral.

"Nine aggressive men tried to enter the archbishopric. After meeting firm resistance from the security team at the entrance of the episcopal residence, they quickly took to the gatehouse and, insistently demanded access to the office of the Archbishop who was quietly at work", reads the statement from the archdiocese of Lubumbashi (in southeastern Democratic Republic of Congo).

The military team was commanded by a colonel who spoke Swahili, escorted by six men in uniform, two white men who spoke only in English and a Congolese interpreter assigned to the Presidency of the Republic.

"These unwelcome visitors," the note continued, "claimed to be part of the advanced team of the

President of the Republic. They specified that they had the task of making security arrangements in view of a religious event to be held at the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul in Lubumbashi during a planned stay of the Head of State in Upper Katanga. Of this curious event, neither the Archbishop, nor the parish priest of the cathedral, nor the competent services of the Province or of the city have the slightest idea", specifies the Archdiocese which puts forward the hypothesis of an attempted kidnapping of Archbishop Fulgence Muteba Mugalu or at least "unjustified intimidation". The commander of the Republican Guard in Upper Katanga declared that the action carried out by his men "was an act of benevolent solicitation of the ecclesiastical authorities to adopt protective measures in the event of visits of high personalities to the cathedral". The Republican Guard (GR) is the unit responsible for the protection of the institutions - in general - and of the President of the Republic in particular, and is distinct from the rest of the Congolese armed forces (FARDC).

### **China - "Scrutiny" of catechumens, "mandate" of altar servers, ecological initiatives. The intense start of Lent of the Chinese Catholic communities**

(27-2-23) Solemn Eucharistic celebrations with great participation of the People of God, "scrutinies" of catechumens preparing for baptism, missionary mandate of lectors and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, who will now be able to take the Eucharist to the sick and the disabled. In the Chinese Catholic communities, the first Sunday of Lent was marked by appointments and pastoral occasions that accompany, according to tradition, the start of the Lenten journey, a "favorable time" to ask for forgiveness of sins, do works of charity and prepare for the joy of Easter. In Shenzhen the first Sunday of Lent started with an ecological journey after Mass. The baptized, led by the parish priests, also promoted an extraordinary garbage collection.

### **Asian leaders end synod preparations discussing 'gaps'**

(27-2-23) Asian Church leaders have concluded their continental-level preparations for making the Church more participatory by discussing key questions that have not been sufficiently discussed during lower-level gatherings.

The continental-level gathering that ended on Feb. 26 in Bangkok was the highest preparation level ahead of the Synod of Bishops, more commonly called the Synod on Synodality, which is scheduled to conclude at the Vatican in 2024. More than 80 delegates from across Asia gathered for the continental-level preparations. They included representatives from 17 national conferences of bishops and two Synods of Bishops, representing 29 countries, covered by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences.

The Feb. 25 press statement did not specify the topics which the delegates discussed. However, they deliberated on key questions that have not been "sufficiently discussed" in lower-level gatherings — parish, diocesan and national— and on "gaps" in the draft paper. They also discussed any Asian realities, experiences, or concerns that can be included or improved upon, the press statement said.



### **Bishops-team reports to Vatican on Indian cathedral desecration**

(27-2-23) A Vatican-appointed team has wrapped up its fact-finding exercise into the alleged "desecration and sacrilege" of the altar of a cathedral-basilica in southern India, linked to a decades-old dispute over the mode of celebrating Mass. Retired Archbishop Maria Callist Soosa Pakiam of Trivandrum, headed the two-member team along with retired Bishop Stanley Roman of Quilon. The team was mandated to establish the facts of a clash that took place on the last Christmas eve inside the St. Mary's Cathedral-Basilica of the Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly of the Eastern rite Syro-Malabar Church based in southern Kerala state.

A group of 29 Catholics, mostly men, are accused of desecrating the consecrated bread and wine when some priests of the Ernakulam-Angamaly archdiocese were celebrating their traditional Mass.

A majority of priests and laity in the archdiocese want to continue with the traditional Mass in which the celebrant faces the congregation throughout the Mass. However, the Synod-approved mode requires the priests to face the congregation only until the Eucharistic Prayer and after communion. The synod approved the new form to have uniform Mass across all its dioceses.

"I will submit a report to the nunciature," Archbishop Pakiam told UCA News on Feb. 27 while declining to speak further citing ill health.



### **Indian priest, three nuns among six killed in road tragedy**

(27-2-23) A priest, three nuns, and two others died in a road mishap in the northeastern Indian state of Meghalaya on Feb. 26.

The accident took place in Sumer, Ri Bhoi district, when a truck carrying cement lost control and rammed into their vehicle in the opposite direction, killing all six occupants, including a male teacher and the driver, on the spot. According to police, the overspeeding truck was going towards

Guwahati in the neighbouring Assam state when it lost control.

The victims, all belonging to Bongaigaon Diocese of Assam state, were identified as Father Mathew Das, parish priest and principal of St. John's High School in Barama, and Sisters Melamine Dantes Promila Tirkey and Rossie Nongrum. A male teacher identified only as Mairan and the driver are the other victims.

### **Churches in Sri Lanka against postponing polls**

(27-2-23) The Anglican and Catholic Churches in Sri Lanka have urged the government to stick to democracy amid moves to postpone local body elections in the bankrupt South Asian country. Police fired tear gas and water cannons on Feb. 26 to disperse protesters in the capital Colombo as demonstrations erupted in several parts of the country against the decision to postpone local elections in the country. The only two Anglican bishops in Sri Lanka said in a statement on Feb.25 that their country "is now under a dictatorship."

The government postponed the elections saying the country has no money to conduct the polls.

### **Police firing, riot leaves 10 dead in Indonesia's Papua**

(27-2-23) Indonesia has deployed security forces to a town in the breakaway eastern region of Papua after 10 people were killed during a riot sparked by rumours of a child abduction, officials said on 24 Feb.

Angry locals in Wamena town attacked police with stones and arrows on 23 Feb., believing them to be holding a young girl's abductors, Papua province police spokesman Ignatius Benny Ady Prabowo told AFP. Police responded with lethal fire, killing eight people, the official said, adding that 23 others were injured in the riot and two were killed by the mob. "Rioters burned 12 shops and one house. Several cars and motorcycles were set on fire," the police said.

28-2-23

### **Pope slashes Vatican employees' pay**

(28-2-23) Pope Francis has issued a *motu proprio* cutting the pay of Vatican workers.

The salaries of cardinals working at the Vatican will be cut by 10%, while department heads and secretaries will be cut by 8%, and other priests and religious by 3%.

The Pope has also ordered an immediate stop to the housing subsidies that Vatican prelates have received, ruling that they must pay market-level rent for properties owned by the Vatican. Any exceptions must be approved by the Pope himself.

Also, the *motu proprio* freezes the automatic pay raises granted to employees on the basis of seniority, except for lay employees in the lower-pay categories.

"A sustainable economic future requires" the pay cuts, the Pope writes, pointing to the budget deficits



that have troubled the Holy See for years. He argues that the main cause is a worldwide economic crisis “that has negatively influenced all sources of income for the Holy See and the Vatican city-state.”

### **Interview: Vatican foreign minister on a year of war in Ukraine, the growing nuclear threat and relations with Putin**

(28-2-23) “We support the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Ukraine,” said Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, the Holy See’s Secretary for Relations with States and International Organizations, as he called for a “just peace.” “At the same time, we recognize the liberty and the freedom of the Ukrainian people to their self-determination.”



### **Russian Catholic leader sees ‘no foreseeable solution’ to Ukraine conflict**

(28-2-23) The vicar general of Moscow’s Catholic archdiocese has said that “there is no foreseeable solution” to the war in Ukraine.

Father Kirill Gorbunov told CNA that the war has brought suffering and disillusionment to the Russian people. Particularly among the country’s Catholic minority, he reported, many families are torn because “people have found themselves on opposite sides of the front.”

### **Cardinal Cupich: Critics of Pope Francis’ Latin Mass restrictions should listen to JP II**

(28-2-23) Citing Pope St. John Paul II’s 1988 apostolic letter *Vicesimus Quintus Annus*, which commemorated the 25th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago writes that “like St. John Paul II, Pope Francis takes seriously that the restoration of the liturgy was the result of the movement of the Holy Spirit.” “Continued dismissals of the Holy Father’s efforts toward achieving the goal of full acceptance of the restored liturgy as the unique expression of the way of praying in the Roman Rite,” he continued, constitute “resistance to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and the undermining of genuine fidelity to the See of Peter.”

### **Protestant health-care group orders end to abortions in Rwanda**

(28-2-23) The Protestant Council of Rwanda, which administers 10% of the country’s health-care facilities, has instructed its member institutions to stop performing abortions.

The Protestant group now joins the Catholic institutions that control 30% of the country’s health-care facilities in forbidding the procedure.

Abortion is legal in Rwanda under some restricted circumstances.

### **More than a thousand Telugu Christians evicted and abandoned in Dhaka**

(28-2-23) Dhaka is the capital and largest city in Bangladesh. The South Asian nation of 166 million—the world’s 8th most populous—is 89% Muslim and 9% Hindu.

The Telugu speaking people are native to neighboring India.

### **The current state of ecclesiastical universities in Rome: numbers, history**

(28-2-23) The 22 pontifical institutions in Rome educate almost 16,000 students. The oldest is the Pontifical Gregorian University (Society of Jesus, 1551); the newest is the Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum (Legionaries of Christ, 1993).

The largest are the Pontifical Gregorian University (2,844 students), the Pontifical Lateran University (1,868), the Salesian Pontifical University (1,780), Regina Apostolorum (1,500), the Pontifical Urban University (1,357), the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross (1,334), and the Angelicum (1,077).

### **Nigeria - Less violence in elections: Observers complain about organizational problems**

(28-2-23) The level of violence in the margins of the elections last February 25, during which the Head of State was elected and the deputies of the National Assembly, although less than in the past, was

nevertheless, according to election observers, there were organizational problems and a lack of transparency.

The head of the international delegation of election observers and former President of Malawi, Joyce Banda, noted that "the late opening of polling stations and logistical inadequacies created tensions, and polling secrecy was compromised at some polling stations due to overcrowding. After polling stations closed, problems with electronically transmitting results and uploading them to a public portal in a timely manner undermined their public confidence at a crucial moment in the electoral process". (1-3-23) 70-year-old Bola Ahmed Tinubu, candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC), the party of outgoing President Muhammadu Buhari, was declared elected on 1 March. The opposition parties have three weeks to challenge the election results in court, their representatives announced immediately after the announcement of the victory of Ahmed Tinubu, who will take office on May 29. The Muslim Tinubu has gained strong support, particularly in Nigeria's Muslim-majority northern region.

The Nigerian bishops, in their message denouncing some serious shortcomings in the conduct of the elections, call on the population to refrain from violence, to respect the law and to continue to pray for the good of the country. Meanwhile, a call for calm and to maintain a language that does not incite spirits comes from Archbishop Gabriel 'Leke Abegunrin of Ibadan, capital of Oyo State in the south-east of the country, who in a press statement invited priests to moderate the language and to refrain from inciting spirits.

### **Iraq - Chaldean Patriarch Sako: Mary brings Christians and Muslims together**

(28-2-23) "Mary has a unique position: she brings Christians and Muslims together". This was reiterated by Patriarch of the Chaldean Church, Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako, in a speech addressed to an audience of Christian and Muslim scholars and listeners, centred on the figure of the Virgin Mary.

The Chaldean Patriarch spoke at an event of the Islamic- Christian dialogue. A group of Shia clerics from Najaf and members of Baghdad's Sunni Judicial Council also attended the meeting on "The Virgin Mary Unites Us," held on February 24 at Baghdad's Latin Cathedral. During the evening, when excerpts from the Gospel and the Koran were read, various speeches were made on the status of women.



### **Haiti - Claretian missionary kidnapped in Haiti released**

(28-2-23) "On February 17, after 10 days of kidnapping, he miraculously escaped from his captors", reports to Fides Father Fausto Cruz Rosa cmf, Superior of the Claretian Missionaries of the Antilles, on the release of his confrere Father Antoine Macaire Christian Noah, kidnapped on February 7 on his way to his community in Kazal.

The criminal gang behind the kidnapping had demanded a large sum of money as ransom for the priest. "Father Antoine is well and we managed to transfer him to the Dominican Republic," added the Claretian Provincial Superior.

### **Christians seek protection as violence continues in central India**

(28-2-23) Christians in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh have appealed again to their state chief minister to protect them as hundreds of indigenous Christians continue to live in the forest amid rising violence.

A delegation under the ecumenical Ecclesia United Forum (EUF) met chief minister Bhupesh Baghel and urged him to take "immediate steps to end violence," said Father Johnson Thekkadayil, a Catholic priest working in the state. "The brutal attacks unleashed on the Christians in Chhattisgarh, especially in the tribal regions, continues unabated," Father Thekkadayil, who was part of the delegation, told UCA News on Feb. 26, three days after they met Baghel.

Christians in the Bastar region, dominated by indigenous people, have been witnessing unprecedented violence, reports say. The forms of violence include social boycotts, assaults, parading men and women nude, and encroachments of Christians' land. Increased violence in the past six months has forced more than 1,000 Christians to flee their homes to save their lives. The state government, run by the national opposition Congress party, claims to be secular but Church leaders say the government fails to protect the Christians.

### **Japanese lawyers decry Christian group's blood transfusion ban**

(28-2-23) A US-based Christian religious group in Japan has forbidden its followers from conducting blood transfusions for their children during medical treatment and emergencies in violation of government guidelines, says a Japanese lawyer's group.

"This is a serious problem involving kids' lives," a Tokyo Bar Association lawyer told reporters, the *Yomiuri Shimbun* reported on Feb. 27.

The Jehovah's Witnesses – a United States-based Christian group – has refused to allow its followers to avail blood transfusions for their children citing religious grounds. Reportedly, the children are made to carry an "identification card" that – in the case of an accident or other emergency – informs doctors and others that the cardholder wishes to receive medical treatment but not blood transfusions, due to religious reasons.

### **Pre-dawn starts in Indonesian schools spark outrage**

(28-2-23) Catholic leaders and teachers' bodies in Indonesia have decried a Christian-majority province's decision to start senior high school classes at 5 a.m. to boost productivity among teachers and students.

The new education policy came into force on Feb. 28 in East Nusa Tenggara province, starting with 10 senior high schools and vocational high schools as a pilot project following a pact its governor, Viktor Bungtilu Laiskodat, inked with school principals last week. School activities previously started at 7.15 a.m. in the province.

Franciscan Father Vinsensius Darmin Mbula, who hails from East Nusa Tenggara province and acts as chairman of the National Council of Catholic Education, criticized the policy as something "excessive" and "does not pay attention to the growth and development of students."

### **Korean bishop stresses 'right to mobility' for disabled**

(28-2-23) A South Korean Catholic bishop has emphasized the need to bring about awareness among people about mobility issues faced by disabled people in the country.

Archbishop Peter Soon-taek Chung of Seoul made the remarks during a meeting with delegates of a National Assembly member's research group, Eyes of the Weak, at the Seoul Bishop's house on Feb. 24, the Good News website reported. The research group had selected the right to mobility for the disabled as one of the agendas for focus this year and had initiated meetings with the religious community heads starting with Seoul archdiocese. Archbishop Chung pointed out that all citizens need to get involved in solving the mobility issues of the disabled.

### **India's Catholic ascetic nun dies**

(28-2-23) An Indian Catholic nun who inspired Hindus with her ascetic way of life in a forest, died in the western state of Gujarat on Feb. 27. She was 88. Father Vinod Kanat who took care of the ailing nun told UCA News that she was alert and even blessed some people who visited her till about 30 minutes before her death.

Sister Prasanna Devi was living in the presbytery of the Junagadh parish for the past nine years as she had no one to take care of her. The nun had lived for over four decades in an isolated hut in the dense forest of the nearby Girnar mountain range, among panthers and other wild animals, until a fall in 2014 compelled her to leave.



The nun had many Hindu followers who used to consider her a goddess and would address her as *Mataji* (mother). Some believed impossible things become possible due to her blessings. The nun did not have any possessions but had many wealthy and influential devotees who at her instruction offered help to the poor and needy.

1-3-23

### **Pope ends free rent for Vatican prelates**

(1-3-23) Pope Francis has ordered an end to rent agreements that have given Vatican officials free or subsidized use of Vatican-owned residential properties.

The Pontiff called for all rental properties to be leased at market rates. The new policy is needed, he said, “for everyone to make an extraordinary sacrifice to allocate more resources to the mission of the Holy See, also by increasing revenue from the management of the real estate patrimony.”

The new policy does not apply to rental agreements that are already in effect, but all renewals of existing leases must be made at market rates—except with the explicit permission of the Pope himself.

The belt-tightening measure comes alongside the Pope’s order to cut back salaries for Vatican employees: a move that he explained was made necessary by persistent Vatican budget deficits.

### **In new book preface, Pope notes riches of Eastern tradition**

(1-3-23) In a preface to a new book by the Korean Cardinal Lazzaro You Heung-Sik, the prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy, Pope Francis says that he welcomes a book “that intends to give voice to the Church of the East.”

“The Church, in its theological and liturgical tradition has always turned to the East, and invites us to look there,” the Pontiff writes, “because from the East rises the light, the sun of justice, the shining star that is Christ.”

### **Court suggests military regime involved in Argentine bishop’s death in 1977**

(1-3-23) A federal court in Argentina has re-opened the investigation into the death of Bishop Carlos Horacio Ponce de Leon, who died in July 1977.

The bishop’s death had been classified as a traffic accident. But the Federal Court of Appeal pointed to evidence that he might have been the target of the country’s military junta. “It has been proven that Bishop Ponce de León was the subject of intelligence operations, surveillance and threats by the repressive organs of the civil-military dictatorship that ruled the country,” the court found.

### **Ancient Antioch one of the cities most devastated by earthquakes**

(1-3-23) The Turkey–Syria earthquake and its aftershocks have devastated Antakya, Turkey—formerly Antioch, so significant in early Christian history. According to one report, 3,100 buildings were destroyed there.

### **DR Congo - North Kivu: Humanitarian situation worsens**

(1-3-23) The recent wave of violence in the province of North Kivu (see Fides, 9/2/2023) has forced tens of thousands of people to leave their homes and seek shelter in different areas of the region. Among them is the capital Goma, from where Father Piero Gavioli, from the Salesians of Don Bosco, reports on the humanitarian plight of the entire population, especially the displaced. “The fighting of the M23 militias blocked supplies to the city in the two supply axes to the northwest of Goma, and have caused the three soccer fields of the Don Bosco Ngangi center – not an official refugee camp - to fill up with provisional shelters”, says the missionary. There are about 3,530 families totaling 26,000 people, including 19,000 minors (10,184 girls and 9,043 boys).

### **Peru - Growing up (and studying) in the Peruvian Amazon. The boys and girls of the “St. Clotilde Boarding School”**



(1-3-23) This year more than two hundred boys and girls will attend the "St. Clotilde Boarding School": 114 girls and 98 boys. For ten months a year the boarding school becomes their home. They come from the rural and indigenous communities of the Napo, Curaray and Arabela river basins and are sons and daughters of 63 indigenous communities. Sister Vianey Ambriz Núñez SJS, who is in charge of the economic-logistical part of the boarding school, reports: "They live permanently in the boarding school because it is their only chance to attend primary and secondary school: some of them would have to travel the river for seven days to return to their villages. The closest ones would take five or six hours..."

Living in St. Clotilde, in the Peruvian Amazon forest on the Napo river, means having unpurified drinking water available for thirty minutes a day, electricity for five hours, using boats and canoes to get around, spending three days and two nights on the boat to reach the nearest town: The smaller speedboats may be called "rapid" but their travel time is still at least eight hours.

The only livelihoods in this part of the Amazon are farming, fishing and hunting. There are no factories or businesses and the level of education in the indigenous communities is very low. The teachers who work in these communities teach only about three months a year, and often the children and young people cannot read or do even the simplest math problems.

### **Vietnam - Sixteen new deacons will accompany future pastoral care for ethnic minorities**

(1-3-23) Sixteen new deacons from the Vietnamese diocese of Hung Húa are to accompany the proclamation of the Gospel and pastoral work in the most remote areas of north-western Vietnam, particularly in the three mountainous provinces of Dien Bien, Lai Chau and Son La, where there are members of the Hmong ethnic minority, who are predominantly of the Catholic faith. Among the 16 newly ordained deacons ordained by Bishop Dominic Hoang Minh Tien on February 14, three are of Hmong ethnicity themselves.

In recent decades, the number of Christians among the Hmong ethnic majority has increased, but the shortage of priests has hampered the mission of the local church in recent years.



### **Indian state-owned firm sold gun barrels to Myanmar**

(1-3-23) An Indian state-owned arms manufacturer has shipped artillery barrels to military-ruled Myanmar, an activist group said on 1 March, warning they could be used by the junta in its crackdown on dissent.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the generals toppled Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government two years ago, ending a brief democratic experiment and sparking mass protests.

The army has used artillery barrages as well as air strikes against opposition groups as it struggles to crush resistance, according to rights organisations, sparking international calls to stop supplying weapons to the junta.

In October, state-owned arms manufacturer Yantra India Limited sent 20 gun barrels to Myanmar measuring 122 millimetres, shipping data obtained by activist group Justice for Myanmar shows.

### **Catholicism 'most trusted religion' in South Korea**

(1-3-23) The Catholic Church in South Korea is the most trusted religious group on the peninsula, according to a recent survey. Among those surveyed, 21.4 percent of respondents revealed that they had more trust in Catholicism in comparison to other religions in the country.

The "2023 Korean Church Social Trust Survey" was conducted by G&Com Research on behalf of the Christian Ethics Practice Movement from Jan. 11 to 15 among 1,000 men and women over 19 years of age. According to the survey, Protestantism came second with 16.5 percent of respondents supporting it, while Buddhism occupied the third spot with 15.7 percent.

However, in comparison to 2020 data, the overall reliability of Catholicism, Protestantism, and Buddhism declined.

2-3-23



### **Vatican investigating clash at Syro-Malabar cathedral**

(2-3-23) The Vatican has sent a team of investigators to India, to report on a violent confrontation that occurred in the cathedral of the Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly last Christmas eve, as a dispute over liturgical reforms boiled over.

A group of 29 Catholics are charged with “desecration and sacrilege,” after they disrupted the celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy, protesting the priests’ posture. The archdiocese has seen a heated dispute over new liturgical rules that were approved by the

synod of the Syro-Malabar Church. Most priests and lay people in the Ernakulam-Angamaly archdiocese favour the traditional liturgy—in which the priest faced the people—over the reformed liturgy, in which the priest turns away for the Eucharistic Prayer.

The archdiocesan cathedral has been closed since the Christmas-eve incident.

### **Papal prayer for victims of deadly train crash in Greece**

(2-3-23) Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Holy See’s Secretary of State, has sent a telegram of condolence in the Holy Father’s name following the Tempi train crash.

### **Utah legislators defeat threat to confessional seal**

(2-3-23) Lawmakers in Utah, US, have defeated an effort to make clerics responsible for reporting all evidence of child abuse, even if that evidence was obtained in a sacramental confession. The proposed legislation, which would have eliminated an exemption for clergy from reporting requirements, would have threatened Catholic priests who upheld the confessional seal. The bill was also opposed by Mormon leaders, who hold considerable influence in heavily Mormon Utah.

### **Vatican releases logo and motto of Pope Francis’ visit to Hungary**

(2-3-23) “Christ is our future” is the motto of the Pope’s apostolic journey to Hungary, which will take place April 28-30.

### **At 10 years, Pope Francis makes Americans ‘uncomfortable’ in their political views, Cardinal Gregory says**

(2-3-23) Pope Francis has made it “totally uncomfortable to take great comfort in any one dimension of the Church’s social teaching,” said Cardinal Wilton Gregory of Washington. “So you can’t be comfortable with just the pro-life banner; you can’t be comfortable with just the progressive social (issues)—you’ve got to have them all.”

### **European bishops back Sunday rest—to combat loneliness**

(2-3-23) COMECE—the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union—has joined in an appeal for a “work-free Sunday” throughout the European Union. COMECE endorsed a statement by the European Sunday Alliance, which notes “the urgent need for synchronized quality and social resting time for workers, in order to enable them to preserve their mental health.” The statement cites a study that concludes a day of rest is “an effective tool to counter loneliness.”

The statement does not mention worship, spiritual health, or the Sabbath rest.

### **Mexican bishops respond to data showing increasingly fewer Catholics in their country**

(2-3-23) The percentage of the Mexican population that is Catholic has fallen from 98.2% (1950), to 87.9% (2000), to 77.7% (2020).

### **After papal visit, spirit of Iraq continues to revive, Dominican priest says**

(2-3-23) Father Olivier Poquillon, OP, who was interviewed for this article, ministers in Mosul. Pope Francis made an apostolic journey to Iraq in March 2021.

### **Holy Land's Christian leaders lament increasing cycle of violence**

(2-3-23) The Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem said in a statement that "painful developments make it ever more necessary not only to immediately de-escalate tensions in words and deeds, but also to find a more lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in accordance with international resolutions and legitimacy."

"With all people of good will, we pray to the Lord for peace and justice in our beloved Holy Land, where all have been tormented by this painful, long-term conflict," they added.

### **Tanzania - Acts of vandalism in the cathedral Santa María Reina de la Paz de Geita**

(2-3-23) "It was 1:56 am on February 26 when Father Charles Kato, one of the resident priests of the episcopate, received a phone call from one of the guards asking him to go immediately to the cathedral. Upon arriving at the place, the guard informed the priest of the presence of a person inside the church who at that moment was running from one side of the presbytery to the sacristy, breaking and destroying everything in his path. This was directly communicated by the Bishop of Geita, Flavian Matindi Kassala, referring to the tragic event that occurred on February 26, when an unknown person broke into the cathedral during the night, destroyed property and liturgical ornaments, and desecrated the Blessed Sacrament, destroying the tabernacle. The police investigation is still ongoing, and it appears that the person in question acted alone. The cathedral will remain closed for Eucharistic celebrations until March 18.

The diocese of Geita is located in the north of Tanzania. Its territory includes the five civil districts of the new region with the same name, plus Sengerema, in the Mwanza region.



### **Myanmar - The Lenten charity of Burmese Catholics**

(2-3-23) During Lent, Catholic communities collect donations for displaced people and those living in poverty in the forests, victims of the ongoing civil war in Myanmar. "In the Catholic churches of Myanmar," reports Joseph Kung, a lay Catholic from Yangon, "during Lent there is an envelope that says: You can practice fasting and donate the equivalent of your meal for the poor, for refugees who are struggling to survive". These days the churches are full and there are many people going to church to receive the sacrament of confession.

### **Taiwan - Positive results for the participation of the Catholic Church in the 2023 Taipei International Book Exhibition**

(2-3-23) In February, the 31st TIBE 2023 Taipei International Book Exhibition took place in the Taipei World Trade Center, with the participation of the local Catholic Church, which gave positive results. The cultural event attracted 505,000 visitors and was an opportunity for initiatives and meetings that made it possible to present experiences and stories of faith and Christian life to people and many young people who had never had contact with the proclamation of the Gospel. Information material about the upcoming World Youth Day 2023 in Lisbon was also presented to the Taiwanese youth in the Catholic pavilion of the fair.

### **America - Summit of the Presidents of the Amazon Region: "We have to face great challenges and have little time to act"**

(2-3-23) The Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM), the Amazon World Assembly (AMA) and the Panamanian Social Forum (FOSPA) published on March 1st a joint letter addressed to the Presidents of the Amazonian countries (Colombia, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Suriname and Guiana), stressing the importance of such a high-level meeting to "resolve the loss of biodiversity, the degradation of strategic ecosystems and the increasing impact on the rights of Amazonian peoples, as evidenced, for example, by the killing of activists and the escalation of violence against women". "The cry of the forest and its people is getting louder and calls on all social and institutional forces not to remain silent and to act," write the representatives of the three organizations.

### **Easter attack victims to sue Sri Lankan prez after he quits office**

(2-3-23) Victims and families of the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings in Sri Lanka are determined to sue President Ranil Wickremesinghe for failing to prevent the terror attack, when he demits the constitutional office.

A Sri Lankan court on March 1 ordered that Wickremesinghe be released from all cases related to the terror attack as he is currently serving as the executive president which gave him constitutional immunity.

"The president and officials are trying to get away without doing justice to the families of the victims. A former president has already been punished and the current president will have to face punishment as soon as his term ends," said Anton Fernando, who has filed one of the 108 cases in court.

Wickremesinghe was the prime minister in 2019 while Maithripala Sirisena was the president at the time of the Easter Sunday bombings that claimed 279 lives and injured more than 500 people.

"We will continue till we find justice and sue him [Wickremesinghe] when he leaves his position as the president," Fernando whose family member suffered serious injuries in the attack, told UCA News.

Wickremesinghe and Sirisena are among the top politicians and officials blamed for their inability to prevent the attacks despite prior intelligence input.



### **Nun candidate ends life in Indian convent**

(2-3-23) The body of a postulant candidate of the Italy-based Sisters of Providence of the Institute of Charity was found hanging in her congregation's house in India, police said.

The body of Anna Poorani, 27, was found inside the room of her convent in Vettuthara near the southern Indian state of Kerala's capital, Thiruvananthapuram, on Feb. 27. The police, after a primary investigation, said it was a case of suicide.

Poorani, a native of nearby Tamil Nadu state, left a suicide note in her native Tamil language, saying no one should be blamed for her death, said Sister Mary Helen Sebastian,

provincial superior of the Sisters of Providence of the Institute of Charity, popularly known as the Rosminian Sisters.

The suicide note, according to the provincial, said, "I am going to Jesus as I understand that I cannot lead a genuine life on this earth." Poorani also owned responsibility for her action and sought "pardon from the mother" but did not specify if it was her biological mother or her superior.

Poorani, according to the provincial, had joined the community for all the activities on the previous night until she retired to bed. She, however, did not turn up for morning prayers. Other nuns went to her room only to find her body hanging from a ceiling fan in the room.

### **Church groups back villagers on Indonesia's power project row**

(2-3-23) Church groups in a Catholic-dominated region of Indonesia have asked the government to respect the rights of villagers, who oppose a geothermal project.



The geothermal project in Poco Leok in Manggarai district in the Catholic-majority Flores island made headlines over the past week after around 100 villagers demonstrated against their district head, who came to inspect the project site on Feb. 27.

"Their resistance should serve as a stark warning that the project cannot be forced," said Valens Dulmin from the Franciscan's Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Commission. People "are angry because their living space is being threatened and they cannot be simply ignored," he told UCA News on March 2.

3-3-23

### **Ukrainian Catholic leader decries Russian ideology as genocidal, compares Russian Church to militant Islam**

(2-3-34) Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk charged that Russia's armed forces are moved by a "deeply genocidal" ideology that denies the "rights to the existence of an entire people with its language, tradition, and culture."

"The culture that could have given rise to the phenomenon of Putinism is very morally sick," the head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church said in a recent interview.

Asked to comment on the Russian Orthodox Church's support of the invasion, the Major Archbishop said that "when a religious institution begins to justify war, becomes a propaganda machine, and promotes Orthodox shaheedism [martyrdom through war], it is on the path of an Islamic state."

"The Islamic world has already experienced something similar. But, thank God, Muslim sages found the strength to reject and condemn this ideology," the Ukrainian Catholic leader continued. "This kind of use of the Christian religion for geopolitical purposes, justifying the atrocities and crimes of a totalitarian regime, is a challenge to the credibility of preaching the Gospel of Christ to people of the third millennium."

### **Ukraine jails conscientious objector**

(2-3-34) A Christian man who refused to serve in the military has received a one-year prison term, after a Ukrainian court rejected his request for alternative service.

Vitaly Alekseenko is the first conscientious objector sentenced to prison in Ukraine since the start of the war. While others who refused military service have received suspended sentences, the courts have ruled that conscientious objection cannot be invoked in time of war.

### **China- Sisters, lay people and priests of Jiangxi plan together the pastoral journey of 2023**

(3-3-23) The work of proclaiming the Gospel in the concreteness of daily life involves all the baptized, priests, consecrated and lay people, and is also expressed in the practice of charity in favour of all fellow citizens. This is in summary the data that emerged during the day of reflection and prayer shared by parish priests, consecrated women and lay people of the Catholic community of Jiangxi to discuss and elaborate together some key points of the pastoral journey for the current year.



Among the priorities on which to concentrate energies in pastoral work, there is first and foremost the urgency of promoting a good spiritual and doctrinal formation for the godfathers and godmothers of the catechumens who will receive baptism at Easter, promoting the ecclesial passion of all the baptized and their involvement in charitable works, also participating in this way in the Synodal Path of the universal Church.

### **Brazil - Two hundred migrant families integrated into society in two years of life of Casa Bom Samaritano**

(3-3-23) "We celebrate these two years with gratitude to God, with the joy of having seen that all the families who were in the Casa Bom Samaritano have left with the tranquility of having in the family

group at least one person with a job, as well as other material supports and also with all their regular situation, both in terms of documents and access to social benefits". With these words Sister Rosita Milesi, director of the Institute for Migration and Human Rights (IMDH), who also collaborates in various fields and services in the Casa Bom Samaritano in Brasilia, underlines the two years of activity of the Center, inaugurated in February 2021.

The Center welcomes groups of families, where parents and children participate in a special program aimed at integral human development. All family members receive attention in various aspects: training, complete assistance for the children, job training, follow-up in case of illness or need for health care, daily moments of prayer, psychological attention and legal guidance. In these two years the House has welcomed just over 200 families.



### **Hindus target Christian stall at India's top book fair**

(3-3-23) A group of Hindu hardliners allegedly vandalized a Christian book stall at the prestigious New Delhi World Book Fair in India's capital, objecting to the distribution of copies of the Holy Bible.

The stall, run by The Gideons International in India, a Protestant Christian non-profit organization, was targeted on March 1 at the 31st edition of the book fair, considered a major calendar event in the publishing world.

"All of a sudden, around 40 men came, wearing saffron scarves and a *tilak* [an ornamental spot worn on the forehead mainly by Hindus] and began shouting: 'Free Bible *bandh karo, dharam parivartan bandh karo* [stop distributing free copies of the Bible, stop religious conversion]. *Jai Shree Ram* [hail Lord Ram]'," David Philip, a member of The Gideons International in India, told UCA News on March 2.

"One of them pushed me and I fell down on a chair. Some of them even picked up the Holy Bible and threatened my colleague and me to stop the free distribution of the copies," he said.

The nine-day mega event from Feb.25 to March 5 was held in New Delhi, in which 30 countries and over 1,000 publishers and exhibitors are taking part.

Philip said that there were different spiritual and religious book stalls, but only The Gideons International, an evangelical association of Christian professionals, was targeted.

Later, police arrived and asked us to file a complaint. However, as directed by our head office, we did not follow it up, Philip said.

### **Indian Christian educators denied bail in conversion case**

(3-3-23) A top court in India's northern state of Uttar Pradesh has denied anticipatory bail to two top Christian educators accused of mass conversion.

Rajendra Bihari Lal, the vice chancellor of Sam Higginbottom University of Agriculture, Technology and Sciences, and his brother, Vinod Bihari Lal, who serves as the director at the university, had moved an application in the Allahabad High Court seeking anticipatory bail when police summoned them for interrogation earlier this month.

Justice Manju Rani Chauhan of the Allahabad High Court on Feb. 28 noted that there was material evidence against the duo and hence their application "stands rejected."

Police have been investigating a complaint of mass conversion reported at Harihar Ganj in the state's Fatehpur district on April 14, 2022, which happened to be the Maundy Thursday.

The judge while elaborating on the grounds for rejecting their bail application said the intent behind the charitable works undertaken by the Lal brothers appears to be dubious, affecting the lives of marginal sections of society as reported in the alleged case of Mass conversion.

Police say some 70 people had been invited to attend prayers at the Evangelical Church of India in Harihar Ganj but the real purpose was to convert them to Christianity by playing fraud and promising easy money.

A mob of Hindu nationalists complained to the government officials that it was a case of mass religious conversion and sought action against those involved in it. The police filed cases against 55 Christians and arrested 26. However, all of them were let off on bail.

### **Myanmar Christians face harsh curbs on religious activities**

(3-3-23) Christians in Myanmar's conflict-torn Chin state are facing increasing restrictions on their religious activities, including Sunday services, by the military junta under the recently extended martial law.

Military commanders are enforcing a strict 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew and a ban on gatherings of more than five people in seven of the nine townships in the Christian stronghold in western Myanmar

A Church source from Chin state said the new rules are affecting

local Christians as the junta wants them to seek permission for holding Sunday services seven days in advance.

"It is a difficult situation and holding Church-related activities including Sunday services is proving very tough under the new rules," the source told UCA News.

Christian leaders from various denominations in Hakha, the capital of Chin state, recently met with local military officials to discuss a way out and since then Sunday services are allowed.

But the local authorities are asking churches to provide them with the names of priests, lists of churchgoers, and phone numbers of those who attend the services.



### **Timorese prez seeks donors to fund NGOs, Church groups**

(3-3-23) Timor-Leste president José Ramos-Horta has appealed to international partners to invest in Church organizations and civil society groups stating that the government has sufficient funds but lacks the necessary resources to execute social development programs.

"Please do not invest in government programs because the government's budget is already large and there is no execution capacity," Horta said during a March 1 national-level meeting for children's rights in the Catholic-majority nation.

Citing sufficient fund availability but a lack of resource personnel, Horta urged the participants to look for alternative strategies to facilitate the implementation of government projects in Timor-Leste.

4-3-23

### **Haiti - UN report: modern weapons smuggled into Haiti by the United States**

(4-3-23) Over 500,000 illegal firearms may be in circulation in Haiti. This is the figure reported by the report published on March 3 by the UNODC (UN Office for Drug Trafficking and Crime) entitled "Haiti's Criminal Markets: Mapping Trends in Firearms and Drug Trafficking,". The data reported refers to 2020 and is been published by the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (CNDDR). This evaluation is however considered approximate; what is certain - says the UNODC - is that "while the number of weapons circulating in Haiti may never be known, the vast majority of these are illegal."

"The main source of firearms and ammunition in Haiti is in the United States, and in particular in Florida," the report said. The weapons are bought by intermediaries and nominees in the states of the federation that have loose legislation on their sale and then sent to Florida from where they take the road to the Caribbean state. "Weapons are shipped in containers directly from South Florida ports, hidden inside consumer products, electronic equipment, garment linings, frozen foods or even the hulls of freighters. Upon arrival in Haiti, the cargo is offloaded and transferred to end users through a variety of intermediaries.

Other routes used by arms traffickers are the neighboring Dominican Republic and to a lesser extent Jamaica, where, a note in the report points out, has also "recorded a surge in firearms seizures in recent years.



### **Hong Kong - Parishes accompany the faith journey of 1,700 catechumens**

(4-3-23) After the parish scrutiny, the parishes of the diocese of Hong Kong are now accompanying the journey of faith of the 1,700 catechumens towards the diocesan scrutiny which will take place on the third Sunday of Lent, on 12 March. According to reports from Kung Kao Po, the weekly bulletin of the diocese of Hong Kong, the "Formation trip for new Catholics", the usual annual appointment of

the Hong Kong Laity Association (Hong Kong Central Council of Catholic Laity (HKCCCL), is also ready. It is a series of events with the aim of helping the newly baptized to become more mature Catholics. The course of the event includes a series of activities including a guided tour of the sanctuary, 37 weeks of reflection on the Word and works of charity. At the same time, the lay faithful, the Catholic family will be involved to raise awareness of their responsibility in the proclamation, in the journey of faith of the catechumens and the newly baptized.

5-3-23

### **Pope at Angelus: Christians must share the glorious light of God's love**

(5-3-23) Speaking to the faithful gathered in a sun-filled Saint Peter's Square for the Angelus on Sunday, Pope Francis gave his customary reflections before leading the recitation of the Marian prayer.

He recalled the day's Gospel of the Transfiguration when Jesus revealed the glorious light of God's majesty and beauty shining on His face and clothing.

The disciples Peter, James and John witnessed this spectacular moment when Jesus reveals to them "the beauty and splendour of divine Love incarnate in Christ," the "perfect image of the Father" and "a foretaste of paradise."

The Face of Love

The Pope recalled how the awe and surprise the disciples experienced shook them, as the beauty of the Transfiguration overwhelmed them and brought about immense joy.

This experience marked a step in the disciples' preparation by Jesus when they would have to recognize this same beauty of boundless love when He would be crucified and His face disfigured.

Peter wished to prolong the wondrous Transfiguration experience, the Pope observed, but Jesus does not allow it, as there is a risk His light could be reduced to a "magical moment" or "passing sentiment." Instead, the experience grounds them in their faith, the reality of life, and the journey that must be embarked upon.

Pope Francis explained how the Gospel traces our own path as well and how essential it is to always look to Jesus on our journey "even when it is not easy to understand everything He says and does for us."

By doing so, we also learn to see God's beauty in the faces of family, friends, and colleagues who show their care for us in a variety of ways.

The Pope encouraged everyone to commit to being more generous in our daily lives, "by loving, serving and forgiving with greater earnestness and willingness."

And recognizing the light of God's love in our own lives over the "false, artificial light" of our own idols requires effort, he pointed out, but we can start by opening our eyes to it with joy and gratitude by noticing it in those who love us.

### **Pope Francis prays for victims of Greek train collision**



(5-3-23) Pope Francis offered that expression of his concern on Sunday, as he prayed the Angelus with pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square.

The Pope noted that many of the victims were young students who were reportedly returning to university from a long holiday weekend for the start of Orthodox Lent.

At least 57 people died 28 Feb. Tuesday night when a passenger train collided head-on with a freight train. The collision took place near the northern Greek city of Larissa, in the Tempe Valley, some 380 kilometers north of Athens.

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**Recognizing the light of God's love in our own lives over the "false, artificial light" of our own idols requires effort** - Pope Francis (Angelus, 5-3-23)