

CATHOLIC WORLD LAST WEEK

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6-3-23



Papal praise for women and their leadership

(6-3-23) “The woman has the capacity to have three languages together: that of the mind, that of the heart, and that of the hands,” Pope Francis said on March 4, as he received members of the editorial staff of *Donne Chiesa Mondo* [Women Church World], the monthly supplement to the Vatican newspaper. “And she thinks what she feels, she feels what she thinks and does, she does what she feels and thinks.”

“I’m not saying all women do that, but they have that capacity, they have it,” the Pope added.

The papal audience took place as *Donne Chiesa Mondo* commemorates its tenth anniversary.

“Women have an ability to manage and think that is totally different from us and also, I would say, superior to us, in another way,” the Pontiff continued. “We see it in the Vatican too: where we have placed women, things change immediately, they go forward.”

Pope Francis also praised the examples of the mother of an Argentine trade union leader, as well as Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission.

The former, said the Pope, was a poor maid who treated her drug addicted son with tenderness when he was a young adult; since then, “this man has become a great trade unionist.” The latter, said the Pope, calls her seven children every afternoon, and “managed to unblock that opposition of the European Union report to Europe during Covid” by “Benelux [Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg] and some other country that opposed it.”

English woman arrested again for silent prayer at abortion clinic

(6-3-23) Just over two weeks after she was acquitted on charges of praying silently outside an abortion clinic, Isabel Vaughan-Spruce has been arrested for the same alleged offense.

Six police officers took Vaughan-Spruce into custody, saying that she had violated a local ordinance by praying in the “exclusion zone” around the clinic.

The arrest of the pro-life activist comes just a day before Parliament is scheduled to vote on a proposal that would make prayer illegal at abortion clinics nationwide.

Group calls for international ban on surrogate motherhood

(6-3-23) Meeting in Casablanca, Morocco, an international coalition of medical and legal experts representing 70 different countries has called for an international ban on surrogate motherhood.

While surrogacy is illegal in many countries, members of the group pointed out that organizations involved in surrogacy still recruit clients from those countries, steering them toward nations that allow the practice. Thus, the group’s statement stressed the need for an international ban.

Aude Mirkovic, one of the group’s organizers, explained that surrogacy has become a lucrative international business. “The result is that women are being used, exploited to give birth to children for clients in various countries, and these children are being ordered and delivered in execution of a contract.”

Regulate ocean activity, Pope suggests

(6-3-23) Pope Francis has sent a message to the 8th annual “Our Ocean” conference, saying that the oceans should be treated as “a gift from the Creator.”

The papal message calls for an “integral vision of ecology,” and suggests that governments establish new systems to regulate activity on the oceans.

Papal message to UK Catholic youth conference

(6-3-23) Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Holy See's Secretary of State, sent a message in the Holy Father's name to Flame 2023, a Catholic youth conference that took place on March 4.

"His Holiness prays that Almighty God will richly bless their time together, so that through adoration, music, testimonies and the sharing of friendship with Christ and with one another, all present will grow strong in faith and love and bear witness courageously to the Gospel message that sets us free," said Cardinal Parolin.

'In persona episcopi': Pope Francis continues to consolidate Italian dioceses

(6-3-23) Continuing a trend that has accelerated in recent years, Pope Francis united two Italian dioceses *in persona episcopi* [in the person of the bishop] on March 4.

While continuing to govern the Archdiocese of Matera-Irsina (which was formed from a 1976 diocesan merger), Archbishop Antonio Giuseppe Caiazzo will also govern the Diocese of Tricarico.

It was the third such union in 2023, and at least the seventeenth such union since 2019.

Such arrangements for Italy's 227 dioceses have become increasingly routine.

In Irish diocese, no priestly ordinations since 2013; no seminarians

(6-3-23) Bishop Paul Dempsey, who has led the Diocese of Achonry since 2020, warned the faithful of his diocese of the "need to let go of some of the familiar ways we have experienced parish life in the past."

"The crisis has become very real," he wrote in a Lenten pastoral letter. "The last ordination to the Priesthood in the Diocese was 2013. We currently have no student studying for the Priesthood."

"Up to 2022, we had a resident priest in every parish, however, this has now changed, and sadly we will no longer be able to provide a resident priest in each parish," he continued. "At best, there will be 12 priests serving in the 23 parishes of our diocese in 10 years' time. It is important that we are fully aware of this reality and its implications. We have never been here before."

Ecuador - The Commission of Indigenous Peoples is asking for the truth about the murder of leader Eduardo Mendua

(6-3-23) Eduardo Mendúa, an indigenous leader in the Amazon territory, was assassinated on the afternoon of Sunday February 26 in Dureno, in the province of Sucumbios, in the northern region of the Ecuadorian Amazon, by some hooded men, who killed him with 12 pistol shots in the garden of his house, where he was with his family. The Commission of the native indigenous peoples of CELAM (Latin American and Caribbean Episcopal Council), chaired by Bishop José Hiráis of Huejutla, calls for a transparent investigation to identify the material and intellectual perpetrators of the murder.



Cambodia - There are 95 young catechumens in the community of Phnom Penh

(6-3-23) They have symbolically knocked on the doors of the Church to ask to be admitted to the last phase of their preparation for baptism. There are 95 young Cambodian catechumens who, in the Apostolic Vicariate of Phnom Penh, have begun the 40-day journey during Lent that will lead them to receive the Sacrament of Baptism on Easter night 2023. "The time of Lent is an opportunity to be ready to meet God, who speaks and manifests himself in every moment. Let us take advantage of this time for our personal journey of conversion", said Bishop Olivier Schmitthaeusler, Apostolic Vicar of Phnom Penh, imposing the sacred ashes on them and inviting them to live this Lenten journey with particular spiritual intensity, with prayer, fasting, assiduous attendance at the Word of God and community meetings, works of mercy and charity.

Somalia - Peace talks for the serious humanitarian crisis in Las Anod

(6-3-23) Peace talks are underway to stop the fighting that does not seem to subside around the city of Las Anod, capital of the Sool region, in southeastern Somaliland about 1,000 km northwest of the Somali capital Mogadishu.

"Somaliland troops have been asked to stop bombing civilians and stop the war", Sonkor Geyre, president of the Institute of Federalism and Security Analysis in Mogadishu told Agenzia Fides, regarding the peace talks between the parties, also mediated by neighboring Ethiopia, a spokesman for the Security Council. "We are facing the most serious humanitarian crisis these regions have ever experienced and the situation is getting worse day by day. The attention of the international mass media is very low and we trust the ongoing peace processes for a rapid resolution of the conflict and to restore peace."

Fighting between Somaliland troops and local militias of the local Dhulbahante clan, which is demanding autonomy, resumed on 6 February.

Russia - The Assembly of Catholic Bishops looks at the suffering of peoples: "There is no healing without listening to the other"

(6-3-23) "The bishops once again draw the attention of the faithful to the reality of our world, to the suffering caused by war, violence and natural disasters". Thus reads the communiqué at the conclusion of the 57th plenary assembly of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Russia, held in the "Bethlehem" retreat house, near the city of Novosibirsk, from 28 February to 2 March. The assembly was also attended by the Apostolic Nuncio in Russia and in Uzbekistan. In the statement, the Bishops recall the suffering of many men and women in contemporary society, especially in Ukraine, the Caucasus, Syria and Turkey, and also the wound inflicted on individuals and on society by separations, divorces, domestic violence, abortions, poverty of the hungry, the homeless and those who find themselves in situations of poverty. "There is no healing without listening and taking seriously what the other has to say, even if it is difficult to understand or unpleasant or sometimes even painful", the bishops have said.



American evangelist attracts thousands in Vietnam

(6-3-23) An estimated 14,000 Christians in southern Vietnam attended a historic religious event organized by an American evangelist association in Ho Chi Minh City. People including government officials from the city and neighboring provinces attended the Spring Love Festival held by the US-based Billy Graham Evangelistic Association at the Phu Tho Sports Facility on Mar. 4-5.

Reverend Franklin Graham, president and CEO of the association told the crowds that "God makes and creates you

and loves you and Vietnam. Jesus is in the city tonight." Each day some 7,000 people attended public Bible talks and Gospel singing, local media said. More than 900 pastors and church leaders from 60 denominations worked together for the event. This was the first time "so many denominational leaders had been under one roof," the association claimed on its website.

Some Catholics and Protestants UCA News spoke with said the communist government allowed a religious gathering at a public place aiming to show the international community the religious freedom enjoyed in the country. They said the government made use of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association to impress international human rights organizations that criticize its record of religious persecution.

7-3-23

Decade-long decline in worldwide priestly vocations continues

(7-3-23) For the first time since 1999, the number of major seminarians worldwide has fallen below 110,000, according to statistics released by the Vatican.

Between the end of 2020 and the end of 2021, the number of seminarians worldwide declined from 111,855 to 109,895.

The number of major seminarians worldwide surged from 63,882 in 1978 to 110,553 in 2000—far surpassing the rate of world population growth—and rose more steadily over the next decade to a peak of 120,616 in 2011. The decline has been especially pronounced since 2019: the number of seminarians stood at 114,058 at the end of 2019.

The 2021 decline in seminarians was most pronounced in North America and Europe. The only continent in which the number of seminarians rose in 2021 was Africa.

During 2021:

- the number of Catholics rose by 1.3%, from 1.36 billion to 1.378 billion, a lower rate than the 1.7% rate of world population growth
- the number of priests decreased 0.57% to 407,872
- the number of religious brothers decreased 1.6% to 49,704
- the number of religious sisters decreased 1.7% to 608,958
- the number of permanent deacons rose 1.1% to 49,176

Irish prime minister: children in primary school should be taught about transgenderism

(7-3-23) After Roderic O’Gorman, Ireland’s Children’s Minister, said the nation’s Children’s Minister, called for transgender education for elementary school children, the Catholic Primary Schools Management Association *said* that “we should not prematurely introduce children to complex and sensitive topics around which there is no scientific or medical consensus.”

Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, who has a male domestic partner, has lent his support to his cabinet minister’s proposal.

Syriac Catholic monk once kidnapped by ISIS consecrated archbishop

(7-3-23) The Synod of Bishops of the *Syriac Catholic Church* selected Father Jacques Mourad to be the Archbishop of Homs (Syria). Pope Francis *gave his assent* to the appointment.

In 2015, Mourad, then prior of a monastery, spent *five months in captivity*.



Mexican bishops condemn police pursuit, violent arrest of migrants on cathedral grounds

(7-3-23) “It is inadmissible for the authorities of any level of government to enter humanitarian assistance facilities for migrants and violate said places, which are also places dedicated to religious worship,” the Mexican bishops said following the arrest at migrants at the *Ciudad Juárez Cathedral*.

Brazilian Church bans sacramental wine produced with slave labour

(7-3-23) After three of Brazil’s most important wine producers were accused of using slave labour last week, the Brazilian Church released a statement affirming that wines made by manufacturers which violate “the respect to human dignity” must not be chosen as sacramental wines. Black Church activists, nevertheless, want more concrete actions from the clergy.

On February 22, three workers fled from a labour lodge in Bento Gonçalves, Rio Grande do Sul state, and reported to the police that they were submitted to slave labour by an employment company that provides workers to wineries Salton, Aurora, and Cooperativa Garibaldi. The prosecutors discovered that 207 labourers, most of them recruited in Bahia state, were forced to work from 5am to 8pm and had only one day off each week.

The workers told the authorities that they were served spoiled food and that they were only allowed to buy products from the lodges’ shop, where all items were overpriced. They would always end up in debt at the end of the month and thus were forbidden to leave the company.

In a statement released on February 28, Auxiliary Bishop Joel Amado of Rio de Janeiro, the Bishops' Conference's Secretary General, said that "the Church has the responsibility to ensure the type of wine used in the celebration of Masses." "In Brazil there are several wineries that offer sacramental wine. Thus, it is advisable to seek for the celebration of Mass wines whose origin raises no doubts regarding the ethical standards in their production," the letter read.

Women religious discuss the sunset of their communities

(7-3-23) Sister Janice Bader, president of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, and Sister Judith Bell, president of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary, discuss Collaborative Governance, which provides "canonical governance and civil administration for religious communities coming to completion." The most recent vocation to the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood was in 2000; the average age of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary is 83.7.

African Synodal continental assembly concludes

(7-3-23) The African Synodal Continental Assembly has concluded in Ethiopia. In their *final statement*, participants described the "African Synodal Family" as "a Church that stretches out, and includes all our differences, diversity, tensions and forces; welcomes others and makes room for their diversity; empties herself, but without losing the foundations and fundamentals of our faith; and a Church that can move."

Mozambique - Armed conflicts continue in the north of the country, thousands of people fleeing

(7-3-23) Kidnappings, disappearances, sexual violence, destruction of properties including schools, health centres and places of worship are the main cause of the flight of thousands of people from their homes in search of safety, family reunification or better opportunities of sustenance. The situation in the Corrane settlement camp, which houses people displaced by violence perpetrated by non-state armed groups in the northern province of Cabo Delgado, is particularly critical. Opened in 2019 in neighboring Nampula province, Corrane is currently hosting around 7,000 internally displaced people. According to reports from the DHPI body of the South African Bishops' Conference (SABC), "these people are trying to make ends meet amidst the animosity of the locals who have been displaced". For five years, attacks by non-governmental armed groups in northern Mozambique have still forced thousands of families to abandon their land. This is an escalation of violence that began in 2017.



South Korea - "Solidarity Race" among Korean faithful: "Let us not forget the victims of the earthquake in Turkey and Syria"

(7-3-23) One month after the disaster of February 6, while the spotlights of the mass media are shifting and international attention is diminishing, it is necessary not to forget the victims of the serious earthquake that hit Turkey and Syria, whose consequences are still very serious: this is what Caritas Korea says, which has announced a special collection, during Lent, to establish an emergency fund of

200,000 US dollars, destined to support the victims of the earthquake in the Middle East.

Bolivia - Our society needs a transformation, changes, we can't wait for someone to start 7

(7-3-23) "This time of Lent should be a time to transform our existence, our way of living more than anything else" exhorted Archbishop of Santa Cruz in his Sunday homily de la Sierra, inviting everyone to seek and find the Lord. He then asked "not to wait for others to do what I have to do" because, "our society needs a transformation, it needs so many changes, and we stay there, waiting for someone to start, instead we are all called to transform something in society".

Chinese worshippers 'must' register online for prayer meetings

(7-3-23) The authorities in a central province of Communist-ruled China have asked followers of all religions to register online for permission to attend all prayer services in religious worship places, reports a rights group.

The officials in Henan province recently issued a circular to implement an order that requires prior reservation and approval from the provincial religious department for anyone willing to attend services in churches, mosques, or Buddhist temples, ChinaAid reported on March 6.

Adherents of religions must make online reservations and appointments through an application called "Smart Religion" and they must select the venue to attend the services. Applicants must fill in personal information, including name, phone number, ID number, permanent residence, occupation, and date of birth, before they can make a reservation. The app, developed by the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission of Henan Province, does not allow religious keywords such as temple, mosque, Christianity, and Catholicism.

Henan is the third most populous province and has one of the largest Christian populations in China. About seven million of the province's more than 98 million people are Christians, according to official data.

Christians slam ban on healing prayers in northeast India

(7-3-23) Christians in a
opposing a ban on
healing prayer events,
constitutional right to
Authorities in Arunachal
issued an order on Feb.
healing, healing
local priest, *pujas* [ritual
remedy to cure various
The order issued by a
practices are misleading



recourse to scientific medical treatment and cause severe health issues." The healing prayer programs also give rise "to social-cultural problems like conversion to other faith and thereby spread discord among people and groups," the order said. It further banned publicizing such events invoking the Drug and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisement) Act 1954, which prohibits the advertisement of remedies alleged to possess magic qualities. The government order stated that the ban is applicable to "all individuals, groups, faiths, and religions."

"This order is against our fundamental right to practice our religion," said Tarh Miri Stephen, president of the Arunachal Christian Forum. Stephan told UCA News on March 7 that his organization will call on the district magistrate who issued the order to know the reasons and appeal to him to withdraw it. Stephan did not rule out approaching the courts if the political leadership failed to protect their constitutional right to religious worship.

northeast Indian state are
organizing and publicizing
saying it violates the
practice their religion.
Pradesh's Upper Siang district
28 banning all kinds of "prayer
crusades, healing through the
worship in Hinduism], as a
diseases and illness."
district magistrate said "such
the innocent people from taking

Rise in online child abuse triggers alarm in Macau

(7-3-23) Online sexual abuse cases involving minors in Macau increased by more than 30 percent last year while the territory experienced a drop in the overall crime rate, a government official said. Wong Sio Chak, the secretary for security in the Macau Special Administrative Region said there was an increase in online sexual abuse of minors whereas crime rates overall dropped by about 14 percent, Portuguese newspaper *Ponto Final* reported on March 6.

"It is important to reinforce sex education and prevention since minors are easily deceived and harmed by malefactors. It is a social issue, it has to get attention from the whole of society, from parents, from schools," said Wong.

Child killed, villagers flee Myanmar junta attack

(7-3-23) A child was killed and thousands of villagers, including Catholics, were forced to flee their homes when Myanmar's junta stepped up attacks on several villages in the civil war-stricken Southeast Asian nation.

Catholics and Buddhists in the historic village of Mon Hla in the Sagaing region took shelter in forests when the military raided their villages on March 6. At least 8,000 villagers fled their homes, according to local residents.

An eight-year-old child, a Catholic from Mon Hla, was killed as a result of shelling by the military, according to the residents. "The child was taking refuge under a tree in the forest and was killed by a shell," a resident, who did not wish to be named, told UCA News.



Indonesian priest's defamation case sparks protests

(7-3-23) A group of priests, nuns and activists in Indonesia staged protest marches on March 6 in support of a crusader-priest being grilled by police in a defamation case filed against him.

In rallies held in two locations in Christian-majority East Nusa Tenggara province, a hotbed of human trafficking in Indonesia, they called on police to drop a libel case against Father Chrisanctus Paschalis Saturnus, filed by Bambang Panji Prianggodo, deputy head of the State

Intelligence Agency in Riau Islands province, bordering Singapore and Malaysia. Father Saturnus, chairman of the Migrant and Overseas Pastoral Peace Justice Commission of Pangkalpinang Diocese, earlier accused Prianggodo of backing human traffickers.

8-3-23

Vatican II highlights zeal for evangelization, Pope tells audience

(8-3-23) At his regular weekly public audience on March 8, Pope Francis spoke about the teaching of Vatican II on evangelization, emphasizing that the missionary work of the Church should be done as a community service. Here is a summary of the Pope's talk:

In our catechesis on apostolic zeal, we now consider the ecclesial aspect of evangelization. The proclamation of the Gospel is not the task of isolated individuals, but a communal service to the Church's apostolic faith, which must be passed down in its integrity to every generation. Zeal for the spread of the Gospel is inseparable from this ecclesial dimension, which protects the Christian message from distortion and from accommodation to worldly interests and ways of thinking.

The Vatican II Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity (*Ad Gentes*) presents all evangelization as having its source in the immense love of God our Father, poured out on the world through the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and prolonged in the Church's mission of proclaiming this saving love to all the ends of the earth. As "missionary disciples", all the baptized are called to imitate the self-sacrificing love of Christ by bearing creative and convincing witness to the truth of his word and its reconciling power, not only for individuals, but for the life of our entire human family.

French bishops' group proposes change to Catechism's teaching on homosexuality

(8-3-23) A group of French bishops has "proposed to the Pope a reformulation of the paragraphs of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* concerning homosexuality," *La Croix* reported.

Archbishop Hervé Giraud of Sens-Auxerre said that "the process of reconsidering homosexuality in the French Roman Catholic Church has been ongoing since the ad limina visit to Rome in 2021," according to a report by Christian Network Europe, an online news portal.

"Since then, several bishops have been working on revising the doctrine. Archbishop Giraud says these proposals 'must obviously be examined by the competent dicastery and submitted to the discernment of the Pope.'"

British Parliament votes to make silent prayer illegal at abortion clinics

(8-3-23) The British House of Commons has approved a bill that would make it illegal to pray, even silently, within 150 meters (492 feet) of an abortion clinic.

The legislation creates a buffer zone around abortion clinics, within which any effort to harass or intimidate people approaching the clinic will be punishable by law. Lawmakers voted down an amendment that would have excluded prayer from the broad definition of actions that could be judged as intimidation.

Nicaraguan government closes Catholic universities, UN call for bishop's release

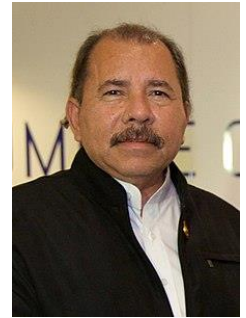
(8-3-23) As the regime of Daniel Ortega continues to persecute the Church and clamp down on opposition, the government declared 18 unions illegal and closed two universities.

The two universities are the Universidad Juan Pablo II and the Universidad Cristiana Autónoma de Nicaragua. Agence France-Presse described both as “Catholic Church-linked.” The Ortega regime has closed 19 private universities since December 2021, the Spanish news agency EFE reported.

Meanwhile, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has called upon Nicaragua to release 37 political prisoners, including Bishop Rolando Alvarez. The UN statement cites multiple violations of human rights and of Nicaragua’s own laws in the detention of political prisoners, many of whom have been stripped of their citizenship rights.

More than 50 religious leaders have left Nicaragua in the past five years, human-rights advocates report. That figure does not include the religious figures among the 222 political prisoners who were exiled in February. The exodus of religious leaders has been caused by repressive measures introduced by the Ortega government, which has been particularly strict in squashing religious resistance to its authoritarian rule.

In his Italian-Swiss broadcast interview the Pope has described the government of Nicaragua as a “crude dictatorship”



Vatican announces ‘24 Hours for the Lord’; Pope to preside at penance service

(8-3-23) The Dicastery for Evangelization has announced that the 10th annual “24 Hours for the Lord” will take place on March 17 and 18, the days preceding Laetare Sunday.

This year, Pope Francis will preside at a penitential service at Santa Maria delle Grazie a Via Trionfale, a church in Rome just outside of Vatican City.

The Vatican encourages dioceses around the world to open churches for 24 hours of adoration and confession beginning the evening of March 17. The Dicastery’s Section for Fundamental Questions regarding Evangelization in the World has published a 40-page pastoral resource for the occasion. The resource includes a testimony by Phan Thi Kim Phuc, the “napalm girl” in a famed 1972 photograph.

Cardinal Kasper again cautions against German schism

(8-3-23) Cardinal Walter Kasper has renewed his criticism of the German bishops’ Synodal Path, telling an interviewer that “you cannot reinvent the Church.”

The former president of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity acknowledged that his fellow German bishops have insisted that they do not want to promote schism. “But one can also stumble into a schism,” he said. He urged the German bishops to “take seriously the questions that come from other episcopal conferences.”

Pastor kidnapped, killed in Cameroon

(8-3-23) Rev. Olivier Ntsa Ebode, who ministered in Obala, Cameroon, was kidnapped and murdered on the night of February 28—March 1, the Fides news agency reported.

He was known for his support of peace in the war-torn country, members of the local community said.

According to the report, a man knocked on the door of his residence and asked him to minister to an ill relative. After he left his residence, he was abducted.

Deploring the murder, the local Catholic bishop has said that the victim was a minister of the Gallican Church (a non-Catholic denomination).

Belarus demands rent for churches

(8-3-23) The government of Belarus is requiring churches to pay rent for their buildings. Church sources in Belarus told Forum18 that they were warned their buildings could be confiscated if they did not pay rent. They were promised that at some indefinite point in the future, they could again occupy the churches without payment. In many cases, the churches—which the government now claims as public property—were seized from the congregations that now worship in them.

Chinese province's new 'Smart Religion' app requires faithful to register to attend worship services

(8-3-23) Religious believers in Henan “must make online reservations before they can attend services in churches, mosques, or Buddhist temples,” according to the report.



Cardinal Parolin calls for safe, regulated migration

(8-3-23) Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Holy See's Secretary of State, has called for safe, regulated international migration. The prelate spoke to journalists during the Cattedra dell'accoglienza (chair of welcome), an event held at Fraterna Domus, a retreat centre in Sacrofano, Italy.

Paraguay - The evangelizing mission of the Catholic school: towards the Global Educational Pact

(8-3-23) The educational system of Paraguay is facing problematic situations such as the lack of free access, limited access to technology and social inequality, among others. In this context, the Catholic Church's commitment is to promote a transformation that values the person, families and facilitates access to quality education.

In a March 6-8 meeting in Bogota of representatives of 13 Latin American countries, Sr. Benítez González of Paraguay said: the current situation of Paraguayan Catholic education requires the implementation of institutional educational networks that allow sharing actions and progress around the Global Educational Pact. Another of the pastoral priorities highlighted is identified in the need to encourage the sense of active and committed belonging of the educational protagonists, according to the identity of the Catholic School.

Myanmar - Women and consecrated women, for a hundred years on the side of the poor

(8-3-23) For a hundred years the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Mary have been present in Myanmar, proclaiming the Gospel with word, life and deeds, always and in any case alongside the population, especially the poorest and most vulnerable. They are still today, amidst the dangers and devastation of the civil war, even when they risk their lives. Just over a month ago, on January 15, the Burmese army set fire to the ancient Catholic church of the Assumption, built in 1894 in Chan Thar, a Catholic village in the Archdiocese of Mandalay (northeast Myanmar) and the adjoining convent of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM) nuns was also set on fire, forced to flee together with about 3,000 villagers. But, while saddened by the destruction of the sacred building and their home, the nuns noted that "by a miracle, the Adoration chapel, in the church, was not touched by the flames", saying that "even in this brutal violence and senseless the Lord is always with us".

The first six FMM Sisters officially established themselves in what was then Burma on February 11, 1923, opening the first small Ave Maria convent in Prang Hkudung, in the diocese of Banmaw. In Kachin state, in northern Myanmar. Today they are in about 20 convents.

Indonesian Catholics rush aid to flood victims

(8-3-23) Catholics in a Christian-majority province in Indonesia rushed aid to victims of floods and landslides that left three dead and displaced more than 5,000 people last month.

In the past week, Atambua Diocese and Catholic Youth in Belu Regency in East Nusa Tenggara province reached out to victims of the natural disasters isolated in their villages and being sheltered by their relatives in the area bordering Timor-Leste, church sources said.

Heavy rain and a tornado at the end of February killed three people and displaced more than 5,236, said Belu Regency's Disaster Management Agency in a March 8 statement. The disaster damaged 625 houses, it said. In addition, access to nine roads was disrupted and crops of at least 1,281 hectares of land were damaged.

The diocese paired up with Catholic charity, Caritas, to distribute aid to victims through a relief center at St. Gregory Nualain Parish, which covers most affected locations. Caritas, while calling for more help from donors, distributed 136 sacks of basic essentials including rice, instant noodles, biscuits, eggs, and soap to the local community by using military vehicles to reach the locations on March 3.

Pakistan Catholics clarify pope's remarks on homosexuality

(8-3-23) Catholic leaders in Pakistan are explaining the Church's position on homosexuals and human dignity after a Pakistani protestant leader's intemperate remarks on Pope Francis' criticism of laws that criminalize homosexuality as "unjust."

"Being homosexual isn't a crime," the pope reportedly said during an interview with *The Associated Press* in January adding that God loves all his children just as they are. He further called on Catholic bishops who support the laws to welcome gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning (LGBTQ) people into the church. However, Pastor Jamil Nasir, the Canada-based national head of the Church of Pentecost in a video titled "Fatwa [religious edict] by Pope Francis" wondered if the pope was promoting homosexuality.

The Catholic Church was prompted to explain the papal stand. The Catholic Bishops Commission for Catechetics (CBCC) posted a series of statements on Christian morality and human dignity on its Facebook page. Emmanuel Neno, executive secretary of the CBCC, said Nasir and like-minded evangelical pastors quote from the Bible to openly condemn people with homosexual tendencies while Muslims, who follow Sharia, also react strongly on the issue.

Last week, Lahore Archdiocese's Catholic TV released a video in response to the flurry of allegations against the pope. "We don't favour homosexuals but condemn killing them," Jasber Ashiq, director of Christian TV Pakistan, said. Ashiq also reminded that Nasir, who has a huge following in Pakistan, had earlier labeled the pope as the "beast in Revelation" but being Catholics, they had exercised restraint.

9-3-23



Pope thanks women, condemns violence against women

(9-3-23) On March 8 (International Women's Day), Pope Francis tweeted: Let us #PrayTogether so that #women, every woman, may be respected, protected and esteemed. Violence against women and mothers is violence against God himself, who from a woman, from a mother, took on our human condition.

At his general audience the Pope said: On International Women's Day, I think of all women: I thank them for their commitment to

constructing a more humane society, through their capacity to grasp reality with a creative gaze and a tender heart. This is a privilege only of women! A particular blessing for all the women present in the square. And a round of applause for women! They deserve it!

Papal preface to book on women's leadership

(9-3-23) Pope Francis has written the preface to *More Women's Leadership for a Better World: Caring as the Engine for Our Common Home*, a new work by 15 scholars.

"We are in great need of harmony to fight injustice, the blind greed that harms people and the environment, unjust and unacceptable war," Pope Francis wrote. "It is not possible to pursue a better, fairer, more inclusive and fully sustainable world without the contribution of women."

The Pope called for "equal opportunities for men and women in every context." At the same time, he spoke of the differences between men and women. "Women's thinking is different from men's, they are more attentive to protecting the environment, their gaze is not turned to the past but to the future," he wrote. "Women know that they give birth in pain to achieve a great joy: to give life and open vast, new horizons. That is why women want peace, always."

Pope Francis meets two Nigerian girls who were kidnapped by Boko Haram

(9-3-23) On March 8, Pope Francis received two Nigerian women who suffered terribly at the hands of the Islamist militant organization Boko Haram. One was held in captivity for nine years; she saw her father beheaded and her brother dismembered with a machete.

Pope reflects on industrial accidents

(9-3-23) Pope Francis met an Italian group that provides insurance of industrial accidents on March 9, and remarked: "A person's health cannot be exchanged for a few extra euros or someone's individual interest."

The Pope also observed that recent months have seen an increase in the number of accidents involving women, "reminding us that the full protection of women in the workplace has not yet been achieved." He went on to say that "the clear separation of family and work environments has had negative consequences not only on the family, but also on the work culture."

Pope meets Christian-Muslim dialogue group

(9-3-23) Pope Francis met on March 9 members of the Joint Working Group for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims.

In his remarks to the group, the Pope concentrated on the status of Jerusalem, remarking on "how many men and women—Jews, Christians, and Muslims—have wept and in our day continue to weep over Jerusalem!" The Pontiff also paid homage to the two clerics responsible for creating the Joint Working Group for Dialogue: the late Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran and Sheikh Mahmoud al-Habbash, who was present at the March 9 meeting.

Polish PM defends John Paul II after report he knew of abuse (AP)

(9-3-23) After a Polish report charged that Pope St. John Paul II concealed abuse evidence while he was Archbishop of Krakow, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki came to his defense. The evidence cited against his "great fellow-countryman" is "very dubious," said Morawiecki.

Philippines - Hazing and abuse of students in universities: an evil to be eradicated

(9-3-23) The recent death of John Matthew Salilig, a Catholic student at Adamson University in Manila, has raised and put the question of hazing and all those practices such as "initiation rites" into associations, clubs or fraternities present in schools and in colleges of the Philippines.

A 24-year-old chemical engineering student, John Matthew Salilig died after an "initiation rite", marked by practices of physical and psychological violence, by the "Tau Gamma Phi" fraternity, present in various institutes and colleges. Reported missing since 18 February, Salilig was found dead in Imus on 28 February. The police arrested and charged 6 of the 14 members of the brotherhood, accused of Salilig's death and concealment of a body.

After the episode, which caused a sensation in public opinion, the "Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines" (CEAP) stigmatized the spread of hazing and such practices, noting that they are

"simply harmful and cruel, contrary to the dignity of human beings", and that "they should find no place especially in Catholic learning communities".

Venezuela - Indigenous peoples are called to become co-responsible for the evangelization of their brothers and sisters

(9-3-23) "Despite all the limits that the environment imposes on the evangelizing mission among indigenous communities, there is great pastoral vitality and significant efforts to continue along paths in which the colonizing mentality is overcome, which considers the indigenous only as the recipient of pastoral and welfare action, without sufficiently recognizing his condition as a missionary disciple, such as his cultural values, his visions of the world and spirituality, in which the presence of God is also manifested". This is what is stated in the final message of the first National Meeting of Indigenous Pastoral Care in Venezuela, which took place in Ciudad Bolívar, in the state of Bolívar, from 2 to 5 March 2023.



HK bishop to visit Beijing seeking exchanges, interaction

(9-3-23) Hong Kong's Catholic bishop is scheduled to visit Beijing next month at the invitation of the archbishop based in the Chinese capital to promote exchanges and interactions between Catholics in the two regions of China, an official statement said.

Bishop Stephen Chow Sau-yan of Hong Kong accepted the invitation from Archbishop Joseph Li Shan of Beijing and he will spend five days in Beijing from April 17, Hong Kong Diocese said in a March 9 statement. Bishop Chow accepted the invitation "in the spirit of brotherhood in the Lord," the statement said.

Bishop Chow, a Jesuit, said his visit "underscores the mission of the Diocese of Hong Kong to be a bridge Church and promote exchanges and interactions between the two sides." Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha and vicar general Father Peter Choy, and the bishop's assistant, Wong Ka-Chun will accompany Bishop Chow during his visit to Beijing. In addition to the meeting with Archbishop Li, Bishop Chow and the delegation will also meet other local bishops, clergy, and laity during this trip, said the statement published in the Hong Kong diocesan website, the *Sunday Examiner*.

Korean Catholics seek more counseling to curb suicides

(9-3-23) Experts and Catholic groups in South Korea have called for more psychotherapy centres and counsellors and urged the Church to promote counselling as part of pastoral care amid a rise in suicide rates.

"[Pastoral] counseling should be added to sacramental pastoral care," said Father Matthew Hong Sung-nam, director of the Catholic Psycho-Spiritual Counselling Centre of Seoul archdiocese. He added that "the Church intervenes in people's lives from birth to death and takes care of them. Similarly, pastoral centers of the Church should try to solve the problem."

South Korea recorded a suicide rate of 26 per 100,000 people in 2021, up from 25.7 in 2020.

Two pastors arrested over alleged conversion in India

(9-3-23) Two Indian pastors belonging to a new religious movement influenced by the Church of God in South Korea have been arrested by police in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh for allegedly luring people into changing their religion.

Pastor Rajat Kumar Shah, a resident of the capital Delhi, and Pastor Abhijeet Mesih, hailing from Chakeri, a town near Kanpur city, were arrested on March 4, police said. Deputy Commissioner of Police Ravindra Kumar told the media they were alerted about an event being held inside a building in Shyam Nagar in Chakeri town to allegedly force poor people to convert. The alert came from members of the Hindu nationalist Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) or world assembly of Hindus, and its youth wing, Bajrang Dal, according to some media reports.

The pastors, Shah and Mesih, are associated with the World Mission Society Church of God, which is said to be influenced by the Church of God, which originated in South Korea in 1964. Media reports quoted police claiming to have found books written in the Taiwanese language from them.

Myanmar Church speaks out against rare earth mining

(9-3-23) Church leaders in Myanmar are up in arms against unregulated mining for rare earth elements — widely used in the production of high-tech devices like smartphones, computers, electric vehicles and solar cells — in the conflict-torn Southeast Asian nation's Kachin state.

Mining for rare earth has increased sharply in northern mineral-rich Kachin state, bordering China's Yunnan province, following the toppling of Myanmar's civilian government by the military on Feb. 1, 2021.

"We are concerned about the effects of environmental degradation, the livelihoods of local communities and the wellbeing of animals due to the extraction of rare earth," said signed by Bishop Raymond Sumlut Gam and four other diocesan leaders, including the vicar general and the chancellor, on March 4 from Banmaw diocese in Kachin state, where unregulated rare earth mining is in full swing by Chinese firms and others.



Plot suspected in sex claims against Indian school principal

(9-3-23) Police in central India have re-arrested a lay Catholic school principal accused of sexually assaulting young girls, which local people say is part of a conspiracy to deny education to tribal people.

Nam Singh Yadav was arrested and detained in judicial custody on March 7, three days after he and three others — a Catholic nun, priest and another lay male teacher — were accused of violating the rights of children. The complaint was registered with police in Dindori district, a predominantly indigenous district in

Madhya Pradesh state.

Yadav was first taken into police custody on March 4 after officials from the State Commission for Protection of Child Rights inspected the Jabalpur Diocesan Education Society Higher Secondary School and its hostel in the district's Junwani village. The police complaint, filed by the district's Child Welfare Committee, accused the principal and others of violating the provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act.

The complaint accused the nun of beating up the girls, and the male teacher of physically assaulting boys. The principal is accused of inappropriately touching eight girls. But no specific charge was leveled against the priest, the school manager.

Yadav was released a day after his arrest following protests from students and their parents demanding his release. They shouted slogans saying the charges against Yadav and others were "fake and part of a conspiracy." Yadav was arrested again on March 7, following the intervention of Priyank Kanoongo, the chairman of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, according to local reports. The police inspector, who previously released Yadav, was also suspended.

Philippines prison ministry to beef up activities

(9-3-23) The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) has vowed to increase the activities of its prison ministry following confirmed reports of drug trade inside jails in the Catholic-majority nation.

"We will increase our presence by assigning more missionaries to prisons... their programmes would hopefully decrease the involvement of prisoners in illegal drugs," Bishop Joel Baylon of Legazpi, chairman of the prison ministry of the CBCP told UCA News on March 9. Bishop Baylon cited the Jesuit-run livelihood programme in the country's biggest prison facility in Muntinlupa City where prisoners are taught how to make crosses and soap.

10-3-23

German Synodal Path approves same-sex blessings (Pillar)

(10-3-23) The assembly of Germany's Synodal Path voted on March 10 to approve church blessings for same-sex couples, setting up a clear confrontation with the Vatican. By an overwhelming vote of 176 to 14 (with 12 abstentions), the delegates adopted a resolution calling upon the Church to bless homosexual alliances. The bishops participating in the assembly also supported the measure, by a 38-9 vote.

The resolution calls for bishops to "allow blessing ceremonies in their dioceses for couples who love each other but to whom sacramental marriage is not accessible or who do not see themselves at a point of entering into a sacramental marriage." This directly contradicts a 2021 Vatican statement that "the Church does not have, and cannot have, the power to bless unions of persons of the same sex."

Pope Francis: Welcome migrants for who they are, more than for what they can contribute

(10-3-23) On March 9, Pope Francis received participants in Cattedra dell'accoglienza (chair of welcome), an event held at Fraterna Domus, a retreat centre in Sacrofano, Italy.

In his Italian-language address, the Pope drew attention to two passages in his 2020 encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti* and said, "In the Old Testament, I have always been struck by the recurrence—in the prophets, in the historical books—of the three people to whom special attention must be paid: the widow, the orphan and the migrant."

The Pontiff had earlier sent a message to the event, and Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Holy See's Secretary of State, had called for safe, regulated migration in remarks to journalists there.

Leading Kenyan bishop: LGBTQ ideology 'seeks to destroy life'

(10-3-23) The bishops of Kenya have decried a court ruling that permitted the registration of LGBTQ political lobbying groups.

"We fault the determination of the Supreme Court of Kenya and declare it as an effort towards the promotion of the LGBTQ ideology which seeks to destroy life," said Archbishop Martin Kivuva Musonde of Mombasa, chairman of the bishops' conference. "It is an attack on humanity. This ideology is an attempt to undermine the family and cultural values which are rooted in the very nature of humankind."

"It also undermines the dignity of life which is at the core of our beliefs as a nation," he added.

French leaders move to enshrine abortion in constitution

(10-3-23) French President Emmanuel Macron has redoubled his support for a move to "change our constitution to enshrine the freedom of women to have recourse to abortion."

French lawmakers have approved the measure, but the two houses of parliament passed different amendments, leaving final approval uncertain.

Taizé leader, Pope Francis discuss pre-Synod prayer vigil

(10-3-23) On March 9, Pope Francis received Brother Alois, prior of the French ecumenical monastic Taizé Community.

"They spoke in particular about the preparation of the event 'Together: Gathering of the People of God,' which will take place on 30 September in Rome on the eve of the synodal assembly of the Catholic Church," according to a statement from Taizé. Pope Francis announced the ecumenical prayer vigil in January.



High-level meeting of Catholic bishops, Shiite Muslim clerics in Iraq

(10-3-23) Three cardinals and Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia are meeting high-level Shiite Muslim clerics in Najaf, Iraq, at a conference entitled "Catholics and Shiites facing the future."

The third such meeting of Catholic and Shiite leaders, the conference has been organized by the Al-

Khoei Institute of Najaf and the Community of Sant'Egidio, an international lay association. The conference commemorates the second anniversary of the Pope's apostolic journey to Iraq.

South Korea - The Catholic Church presents a petition to Parliament to abolish the death penalty

(10-3-23) On March 13, the "Justice and Peace" Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of South Korea will officially present a petition to the Korean Parliament to abolish the death penalty and introduce alternative punishments. The petition is signed by all 25 Korean Bishops, by priests, religious and laity of the 16 dioceses, for a total of 75,843 signatures of Catholic faithful.

Considering that the collection of signatures has been organized during last year, also marked by the limitations due to the pandemic, the number of over 75,000 signatories is by no means small. Catholics recall that, in recent years, proposals for laws on the abolition of the death penalty have been presented to the National Assembly nine times, but they have always lapsed. In the current 21st National Assembly, a bill named "Special Act on the Abolition of the Death Penalty", introduced by Democratic Party Member Lee Sang-min and jointly promoted by a total of 31 National Assembly members, it has been handed over to the Parliamentary Commission for Legislation and it is hoped that it can be scheduled and soon discussed in the hall.

Argentina - "Let's break the silence that kills": living with dignity in poor neighborhoods, fighting drug addiction and its consequences

(10-3-23) "A para-state is being established which does not rotate every four years and which over time consolidates in its power and financial structure, offering arms, lawyers, protection and many other resources. Without a great social and political agreement, any declamation of a solution to what is happening remains only a mirage". This is the affirmation of the Pastoral Care of popular neighborhoods and of the Pastoral Care of Drug Addiction of the Archdiocese of Rosario, which denounces the abandonment of neighborhoods where the poor and the working middle class live. Here the electric lighting system, sanitation, cleanliness, public transport, roads and sidewalks are lacking. "The people of Rosario today are forced to emigrate not only out of the country but also to neighbouring cities and towns in search of a safer life".

However, the document expresses confidence in the political class, urging them to unite "to make our neighborhoods a place where everyone can live with dignity", to abandon violence in speeches and to eliminate from their ranks those who are accomplices of "a corruption that kills".

It is therefore noted in the document that there is also a need for a health system that has an eye on addictions, to contain and accompany people who consume legal and illegal substances.



Tanzania - The Maasai population forced to abandon their settlements in the protected area of Ngorongoro

(9-3-23) The Tanzanian authorities are pushing the Maasai people away from the Ngorongoro protected area, where most of the population resides, by proposing financial 'aid' that is not sufficient for their minimal needs, as well as an unsuitable settlement area. This was reported to Agenzia Fides by local sources, highlighting what appear to be violations suffered by Maasai populations in their settlement rights. "Some" a local source tells Fides "have been

forced to abandon their homes – that too at short notice - for a long period of time due to the restrictions imposed by the government, despite not being prepared to live in a different place and with a different lifestyle."

Despite the resistance made, between protests and clashes, the Maasai leaders have had few meetings in which they were able to express their opinions on the government project and suggest possible solutions.

N. Korean women told to have more children to boost military

(10-3-23) Government officials in a North Korean province have urged women to have more children as an act of “greatest patriotism” to help boost the military numbers, says a report.

The message was part of a series of ideological lectures arranged by North Korean officials for housewives in the northeastern province of North Hamgyong, *Radio Free Asia* reported on March 8.

“Last week, a lecture was held on active support for the People's Army, saying that having many children and sending them to the People's Army is the greatest patriotism,” an unnamed North Hamgyong source told *RFA* on the condition of anonymity.

The lectures were conducted in advance as part of International Women's Day on March 8.



Internal feud threatens Protestant union in Pakistan

(10-3-23) A simmering feud in Pakistan's Protestant churches over alleged corruption and warps in elections of bishops worsened recently after a diocese independently ordained its bishop, pushing the communion to the verge of a split.

The crisis in the Church of Pakistan, a union of Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Lutherans, began to deepen last month when the Anglican diocese of Lahore defied the Synod of the Church of Pakistan and ordained Reverend Nadeem Kamran as its bishop on Jan. 18.

Ordinarily, the Church's synod, the supreme decision-making body of the union, selects bishops for all eight dioceses of the union, officials said. Some officials suspect the ordination move may end in the Lahore diocese splitting off from the union. The Lahore ordination was “an attempt to sabotage the system of the Church of Pakistan, our ecumenical union,” Majid Abel, moderator of Presbyterian Church told *UCA News* on March 8.

Pope says 'imperial interests' involved in Ukraine

(10-3-23) The war in Ukraine involves "imperial interests", with the world's "great powers" fighting there, Pope Francis said in extracts of an interview published on 10 March.

Speaking to Swiss television RSI, the pontiff described how he had offered to go to Moscow to negotiate peace but had been rebuffed.

"(President Vladimir) Putin knows that I am available," he said, according to a transcript published by RSI, ahead of the interview's broadcast on Sunday.

"But there are imperial interests there, not just of the Russian empire, but of the empires of other sides. It's typical of empires to put nations in second place."

11-3-23



Sisters honour foundress with new mission on the peripheries

(11-3-23) The Sisters of the Apostolic Carmel celebrate the 150th anniversary of the congregation's founding in India by initiating a new work to assist people who live on the margins of society.

Mother Veronica was the daughter of an Anglican Minister, who entered the Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition after converting to Catholicism. While on mission to India in 1861, she began to feel drawn toward the Carmelite way of life.

Her calling coincided with the desire of a group of Carmelite bishops in India to provide faith formation through education and other works of mercy through an Order of Carmelite Sisters. Sister Mary Veronica of the Passion founded the Apostolic Carmel Congregation in Bayonne, France, in 1868. It was established in Mangalore, India two years later.

To celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Congregation's foundation, Superior General Sr. Susheela motivated the Sisters to undertake at least one project in the villages for the poor and needy. Simultaneously, Pope Francis was inviting religious to go to the peripheries and live among the people. And the Sisters founded a house in Jamgi Colony which undertook various works.

12-3-23

Kerala Bishops' Council calls play defamatory, demands ban on it (TOI)

(12-3-23) Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council (KCBC) issued a statement demanding that the govt urgently take steps to ban the screening of the play "Kakkakali", which according to the KCBC was defamatory to the Catholic monastic life.

KCBC said in a statement that a meeting presided over by its president, Cardinal Baselios Cleemis, in which heads of various Congregations took part, discussed the anti-Christian content of the play and condemned it. "Plays and literary works do have the history of making way for changes and social reformation. However, using that history to glorify works which are extremely insulting cannot be accepted," KCBC said.

It said the religious Congregations have the history of protecting the destitute and the powerless, adding in Kerala, the sick, the elderly and orphans stay in the care of Catholic nuns, ten times more than those in the care of government institutions. "It is extremely condemnable that the play which hampers the confidence and self-esteem of nuns, in incomparable service work in the state, found a place in the international theatre festival by the Kerala government," KCBC said in the statement.

It added that the play was retelling baseless allegations against Catholic monasticism by making deformed and unwarranted additions to a work of imagination of a story writer; and it was not right to encourage it.

Pope at Angelus: The Lord promises us the living water of eternal life

(12-3-23) Speaking to pilgrims in Saint Peter's Square for the Sunday Angelus, Pope Francis reflected on the day's Gospel reading, which recounts what he described as "one of the most beautiful and fascinating encounters" of Jesus when He meets the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus asks her to give Him a drink, as He is thirsty and tired, with the hot, midday sun beating down.

The Lord, who asks for a drink, also tells the Samaritan woman about the drink He can offer, the Holy Spirit's living water "that makes eternal life overflow within us." The Pope explained how, "thirsty for love, Jesus quenches our thirst with love," by meeting us in our daily life, sharing our own thirst, and promising us this living water of eternal life.

The Pope said we must follow the example of Jesus, who cries out to us, sometimes in silence, to quench the thirst of a brother or sister in need. Our family members, friends, or coworkers may often ask us for a "drink", but they are thirsting for closeness, attention, or a listening ear, the Pope explained. They may also thirst for the Word of God and need to find "an oasis in the Church where they can drink." This thirst is increased by the deserts of our frenetic societies, often marked by indifference and interior emptiness, the Pope observed.

The Gospel today offers us the promise of "living water" and calls each one of us to become a "refreshing spring" for our brothers and sisters, the Pope concluded.

At Angelus, Pope calls for solidarity with all afflicted by war

(12-3-23) Pope Francis has called on the faithful to remain "united in faith and solidarity with our brothers and sisters who are suffering on account of war," remembering especially "the tormented Ukrainian people."

He made the appeal as he announced this year's "24 Hours for the Lord," a prayer initiative devoted to prayer of adoration and to the Sacrament of Penance, which occurs each year during Lent. This year's edition will take place



beginning in the evening on Friday, 17 March, and continuing through Saturday, 18 March. Pope Francis began the 24 Hours for the Lord initiative in the first year of his papacy. During the event, churches around the world remain open for an entire day, to offer the faithful and pilgrims the opportunity to pause in adoration and go to Confession.

In his announcement at the Angelus on Sunday, the Holy Father recalled the Act of Consecration of Russia and Ukraine to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, which took place during last year's penitential service, with its special prayer for peace.

Pope Francis also announced that he will be marking the 24 Hours for the Lord service by visiting the Roman parish of Santa Maria delle Grazie al Trionfale next Friday evening for penitential service that will include the Sacrament of Reconciliation (or Confession).

Jesus cried out, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me! Let the man come and drink who believes in me! From his breast shall flow fountains of living water" (Jn 7: 37,38)
