

## CATHOLIC WORLD LAST WEEK

(CWLW)

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### **Key witness manipulated in Vatican trial?**

(5-12-22) The Vatican's landmark financial trial has produced another stunning revelation: a key prosecution witness may have been manipulated by an adviser who was herself convicted in an earlier Vatican trial.

The revelation that Msgr. Alberto Perlasca prepared his testimony with help from Francesca Chaouqui—who was convicted in connection with the 2016 “Vatileaks” scandal—has been followed by the release of text messages in which Chaouqui seems to be framing Perlasca's testimony to suit her own purposes—reminding him at one point that “you owe me a favour.”

Msgr. Perlasca, once regarded as a leading suspect in the criminal case involving the purchase of a London real-estate property, became a leading witness for the prosecution after he agreed to present evidence against Cardinal Angelo Becciu.



### **Zelensky orders full probe of Ukrainian Orthodox Church**

(5-12-22) Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has ordered government officials to “ensure the religious examination of the Management Statute of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church for the presence of a church-canonical connection with the Moscow Patriarchate and, if necessary, to take measures provided for by law.” The presidential directive requires an inquiry into the “connections of certain religious circles in Ukraine with the aggressor state”—an

obvious reference to the longstanding ties between the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) and the Patriarchate of Moscow. However, the results of such an investigation are not clear, particularly since the UOC has been asserting its independence from Moscow in the wake of the Russian invasion. Zelensky's initiative could provide Russia with a new propaganda topic: a claim that the war is necessary to save the UOC from persecution. At the same time, it could lead to resentment among the Orthodox faithful, including those who believe that the Zelensky government has sided with the other major Orthodox body, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), which has already made a definitive break with Moscow.

### **Investigation clouds legacy of Honduran Cardinal Maradiaga**

(5-12-22) A Vatican investigation has not yet resolved charges of mismanagement and financial misconduct against Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga of Tegucigalpa, the chairman of the Pope's Council of Cardinals.

The focus of the investigation is on the Catholic University of Honduras, from which the cardinal reportedly received about \$500,000 annually, for which no accounting has been provided. Cardinal Maradiaga, who has weathered charges of financial mismanagement for several years, is approaching his 80th birthday on December 29, and will be expected to tender his resignation from the Council of Cardinals. According to a *National Catholic Register* analysis, the Vatican is likely to accept that resignation promptly to avoid further connection with the scandal in Honduras.

### **‘Synodal way’ architect says political tactics built pressure for change**

(5-12-22) Thomas Sternberg, a layman who was co-president of Germany's Synodal Way from 2019 to 2021, discussed his strategy for building pressure against Catholic teaching on homosexuality and women's ordination.

“I am a politician to the extent that I know that it takes processes and developments to make topics

worthy of discussion in the first place," he said. "Only through pressure does real change occur."  
(Pillar)

### **Vatican Swiss Guard slayings back in spotlight with new book**

(5-12-22) "Vatican officials are evidently convinced that Cedric Tornay, a vice-corporal in the Swiss Guard, killed his superior, Colonel Alois Estermann and his wife, then himself, in a shocking burst of violence," CWN reported in 1998.

With the support of Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican Secretary of State, Tornay's mother's attorney was permitted to look at the Vatican investigative file into her son's death. The file, she said, "confirmed all the doubts that the mother had about an investigation conducted in an absolutely superficial way."

### **DR Congo - Thousands of people take part in the bishops' march for peace in the east of the country**

(5-11-22) "Our march has no political meaning, it aims to show the world that we are one people, united for the national cause, united for the sovereignty of our country and for the dignity of our people," declared Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo, Archbishop of Kinshasa, in his message addressed to the participants of the march which took place on Sunday, December 4, in the dioceses of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The march was promoted by Congolese Catholic bishops to protest against violence in the east of the country.



Rosary in hand, religious hymns, crucifixes and banners, demonstrators of all ages took part in about fifteen marches in the capital Kinshasa and walked the streets of many other cities. However, the planned march in Goma, capital of North Kivu, was cancelled to avoid any "possible infiltration". "No to the balkanization of the DRC", "No to the hypocrisy of the international community..." The same slogans were chanted in the many processions which left Congolese parishes after mass.

### **Ethiopia - Disengagement of the Tigrinya forces: silence of arms for a peaceful return to daily life**

(5-11-22) The diplomatic breakthrough that led to the signing of the peace agreement on November 2 in South Africa and the disarmament agreement of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), signed on November 12 in Kenya, is producing significant results in many conflict areas. Neblet, Maikinetal, Cherecher, Beri Teklay, Hugumburda, Zalambessa and Abergele are some of the localities where the Tigray Forces (TDF) withdrew to let the Federal Army troops (ENDF) enter. Just over a month after the end of hostilities in the Tigray region, fundamental steps towards peace have been taken: according to statements by General Tadesse Werede, Commander-in-Chief of the Tigray Defense Forces, 65% of his forces withdrew from many areas of conflict. The general said the recent disarmament meeting, held on December 1 in Shire, northwestern Tigray, is moving the peace process forward and it was important that senior military officials from both parties meet in Ethiopia.

### **Philippines - The "Silsilah" movement: Advent, a season of reconciliation and peace between Christians and Muslims**

(5-12-22) May the time of preparation for Christmas, which the Catholic Church calls "Advent", "be a time of reconciliation and peace in the Philippines and throughout the world": this is the message spread by the Islamic-Christian dialogue "Silsilah" movement, active in the southern Philippines, while the "Week of Peace in Mindanao", promoted by the Philippine government, ended on December 5th. The "Silsilah" movement, founded by PIME missionary Fr. Sebastiano D'Ambra in an area where there is a Muslim community of 6 million people, concentrated almost entirely in the "Bangsamoro Autonomous Region", prays: "Lord, we beg you for peace. Advent and Christmas remind us of the message of peace and reconciliation that reaches all humanity. But we cannot share peace if we do not have peace within us. This invites us to reflect: how will the arrival of Christmas this year touch

our hearts and help us move with harmony, solidarity and peace?".

Silsilah writes: "We invite Christians and the faithful of other religions to live this special time by showing solidarity and promoting gesture or sign of peace that comes from different groups or communities, feeling part of the same human fraternity."

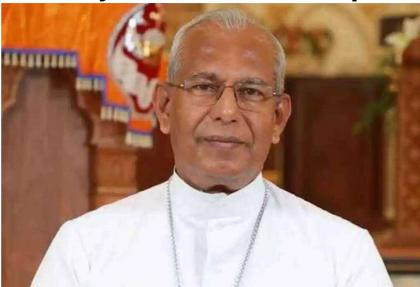
### **Colombia - Violations of environmental and social rights in Latin America and the Caribbean: accompaniment of the Church**

(5-12-22) Make known the pastoral experiences that accompany situations of socio-environmental violation at the local, national and regional-international level, as well as re-launching the appeal for the Church to continue to accompany those who find themselves living in these realities in various forms: legal, social promotion, pastoral accompaniment, advocacy, "the cry of the poor" and "the cry of Mother Earth".

This is the main objective that prompted the Episcopal Council of Latin America and the Caribbean (CELAM), through its "Commission for Integral Ecology" platform, linked to the Centre for Pastoral Action Programmes and Networks (CEPRAP), to open a space for dialogue and reflection on emblematic cases of violations of environmental and social rights in the different regions of Latin America and the Caribbean.

As Romina Gallegos Brito, of the CEPRAP team explains, in this space cases will be presented in which "situations of violation and socio-environmental pressures have been experienced", at the same time we will also talk about how the Church has been able to get involved and closely accompany these situations.

### **Syro-Malabar bishops denounce Vatican appointee's actions**



(5-12-22) The bishops of the Eastern rite Syro-Malabar Church in India have expressed displeasure over the style of functioning of an apostolic administrator appointed to settle a liturgical dispute in one of its archdioceses.

Nine bishops in a confidential letter to Cardinal George Alencherry, head of the Oriental Church based in the southern state of Kerala, have urged him "to do everything possible to stop this crisis with a pastoral solution." The Nov. 28 letter, which was leaked in the media, blamed Archbishop

Andrews Thazhath, the apostolic administrator of the Ernakulam-Angamaly archdiocese, for derailing a peace process to settle the nearly five-decades-old liturgical dispute amicably.

Archbishop Thazhath had made an abortive bid to force his way into the St Mary's Cathedral Basilica on Nov. 27 to offer Mass in the uniform mode as approved by the synod in 1999 requiring the priests to face the altar during the Eucharistic prayer. This angered the priests and laity in the archdiocese who are opposed to the uniform Mass and want to stick to their traditional mode in which the celebrant faces the congregation throughout. The archbishop's actions led to a street fight that ultimately resulted in the Basilica being closed and kept under police watch.

"We understand that the Basilica Vicar and curia members had informed him [Archbishop Thazhath] of the grave law and order situation there and requested him not to come. We regret to say that his visit was unfortunate and it worsened the situation," the bishops stated in the letter. They said the archbishop's actions were "an improper act" as a three-member panel appointed by Cardinal Alencherry had initiated a dialogue with the priests and laity on Nov.25. "The provocation will only strengthen the protest; violence breeds violence is a proven truth," the prelates said. The priests and laity in the archdiocese have been on a war path since August last year after the Synod of the Oriental Church instructed its 35 dioceses to adopt the uniform Mass.

The bishops in their letter said the protracted liturgical dispute and subsequent developments "has tarnished the image of the Church and put the credibility of the Synod at stake." The signatories to the letter include Archbishop Antony Kariyil, Archbishop Kuriakose Bharanikulangara, Bishop Thomas

Chakiath, Bishop Gratian Mundadan, Bishop Dominic Kokkat, Bishop Jose Chittooparambil, Bishop Sebastian Adayanthrath, Bishop Ephrem Nariculam, and Bishop Jose Puthenveetil.

### **Unification Church 'made millions from spiritual sales'**

(5-12-22) The controversial Unification Church has siphoned millions from its followers through so-called “spiritual sales” over the years, claims the top lawyers’ association in Japan. During a news conference on Nov. 30, the Tokyo-based Japan Federation of Bar Associations (JFBA) said that about 50 percent of complaints over “spiritual sales” are related to the Unification Church, the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper reported.

These sales are ones by which religious organizations sell goods or services at exorbitant prices promising supernatural benefits such as preventing bad luck or soothing the souls of deceased loved ones.

As of Oct. 24, the church has been complicit in 309 of a total of 624 spiritual sales cases, JFBA officials said, adding that the complainants have lost more than 10 million yen (US\$72,000) to the Unification Church.

### **Myanmar remains on US religious freedom blacklist**

(5-12-22) Military-ruled Myanmar has been named among 12 countries by the United States that are of “particular concern” for religious freedom violations.

Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, joined China, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Cuba, Eritrea, Iran, Nicaragua and North Korea on Washington’s blacklist for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom under the International Religious Freedom Act 1998, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement on Dec. 2.

Algeria, the Central African Republic, the Comoros and Vietnam were placed on the Special Watch list for engaging in or tolerating severe religious freedom violations.



### **North Korea executes teens for distributing foreign films**

(5-12-22) Terrified residents expressed grave shock as North Korean authorities publicly executed three teenagers by firing including two who allegedly watched and distributed South Korean movies, says a report. A third teenager was accused of murdering his stepmother, Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported on Dec. 2 quoting witnesses.

The officials in the ultra-communist state have claimed that the crimes committed by teens aged around 16 or 17 were “equally evil” and forced the shocked residents of Hyesen city near the border with China to watch the firing.

“They said, ‘Those who watch or distribute South Korean movies and dramas, and those who disrupt social order by murdering other people, will not be forgiven and will be sentenced to the maximum penalty—death,’” said a local resident.

### **Indian bishop wins reprieve from likely arrest**

(5-12-22) An Indian court has granted anticipatory bail to Bishop Thomas Dabre of Pune, averting his likely arrest as a co-accused in a case of alleged clergy sexual abuse.

Bishop Dabre was named by Pune city police in the western Indian state of Maharashtra in a case under provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act. The case involves Father Vincent Pereira of Pune diocese, who was accused of abusing a 15-year-old schoolboy.

The case registered in September this year also named Cardinal Oswald Gracias, the archbishop of Bombay and former president of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India, along with Bishop Dabre, for allegedly shielding the alleged culprit priest despite complaints from the victim’s family.



Fearing arrest, Bishop Dabre had applied for anticipatory bail, a legal provision under which a court prevents the police from arresting a person by imposing certain conditions on the applicant.

6-12-22

### **Pope sets new accounting standards for Vatican foundations**

(6-12-22) Pope Francis has issued a new *motu proprio* setting accounting standards for foundations and corporations established by the offices of the Roman Curia.

Because they are offices of the Holy See, the Pope writes, these institutions are “subject not only to the supervision of the curial institutions from which they depend, but also to the control and surveillance of the economic bodies of the Roman Curia.”

The *motu proprio* gives the Secretariat for the Economy the authority to supervise the financial affairs of foundations and corporations established by the offices of the Roman Curia. These institutions, because they are semi-autonomous, had previously escaped careful scrutiny.

### **Catholic educators are sent on a common project at the service of humanity, Pope Francis writes**

(6-12-22) “When we approach education, we cannot do so thinking of something merely human, focusing the question on programs, training, resources, areas of reception, since the Christian vocation asks us to give voice to a Word that is not ours, that surpasses us, that transcends us,” Pope Francis wrote in an Italian-language letter to participants in the World Congress of Catholic Education, which took place in Marseille, France.

### **Creche set up at European Parliament: a first**

(6-12-22) A Christmas creche has been set up at the Brussels headquarters of the European Parliament, as the result of efforts by a Spanish lawmaker, Isabel Benjumea.

In previous years, proposals for a Nativity scene were vetoed by officials of the parliament, who said that a Christmas display would be “potentially offensive.”



### **Pontiff receives Jordanian prince active in interfaith dialogue**

(6-12-22) Pope Francis has received Prince Hassan Bin Talal of Jordan, who was visiting Rome to participate in a conference on the Mediterranean region.

Prince Hassan, 75, has been active in interfaith dialogue. In 2012, he urged Arab Christians not to emigrate—a call he repeated in 2015. In 2021, he joined an appeal for the preservation of religious institutions from acts of violence.

### **Myanmar regime bombs cardinal's home village**

(6-12-22) The military regime in Myanmar has attacked the home village of the nation's leading prelate.

“Military troops razed about 200 buildings to the ground, including a school and a church,” AsiaNews reported. Cardinal Charles Maung Bo of Yangon responded with an appeal for peace and dialogue between the regime and rebel forces in his native Sagaing Region.

### **Canadian Paralympian asks for wheelchair, gets euthanasia offer instead**

(6-12-22) A Canadian military veteran and former Paralympian has testified that when she sought help from the veterans-affairs office to obtain a wheelchair, she received instead an offer of physician-assisted suicide.

### **French bishops create national canonical criminal tribunal**

(6-12-22) On December 5, the bishops of France installed a National Penal Canonical Tribunal that replaces all diocesan and interdiocesan tribunals in judging canonical offenses committed by clerics and laity.

"Many people suffer from the slowness of canonical procedures because officialdom is often overwhelmed," Archbishop Eric de Moulins-Beaufort of Reims, president of the Bishops' Conference of France, said in spring 2021, when the bishops approved the court. "The creation of a national structure is also motivated by the difficulty of recruiting personnel for the existing offices."

### **Nicaragua's Ortega steps up offensive against Church**

(6-12-22) *Wall Street Journal* columnist Mary Anastasia O'Grady writes that "Pope Francis is missing in action" as Nicaragua's President Daniel Ortega escalates his offensive against the local Catholic Church.

One Catholic bishop has been jailed since August. Another was physically assaulted by Ortega supporters. Eleven priests have been taken into custody by government officials without formal charges. Catholic radio stations have been silenced.

O'Grady writes: It's no surprise that Mr. Ortega is desperate to silence the church. The Castro acolyte recognizes the threat it presents to his rule, not unlike the church in Poland during Soviet times....Harder to fathom is the failure of Pope Francis to demand protection for his Nicaraguan flock and their local shepherds.



### **South Sudan - Upper Nile: More than six thousand people forced to flee after the assault on the Aburoch reception camp**

(6-12-22) "Here the fighting is very heavy and it is difficult to see the light of peace", explains to Fides Sr. Elena Balatti, Comboni missionary in charge of Caritas in the diocese of Malakal, in the Upper Nile state in South Sudan, where fighting between different armed factions has been raging since August. The latest tragedy is the assault carried out by an armed group on the Aburoch reception camp, in the Upper Nile County of Fashoda, which housed about 5/6 thousand displaced of the previous war (2013-18). For Sr. Elena, the recent suspension of the South Sudanese government's participation in the Rome peace talks "was a cold shower, but this does not mean that the "door to peace is definitively closed".

In mid-November, the government in Juba announced the "suspension of its participation in the peace talks in Rome", accusing non-signatory South Sudanese opposition groups (NSSOG) of "lack of commitment".

### **Myanmar - Humanitarian crisis: New laws affect the work of non-governmental organizations**

(6-12-22) More than 1.4 million people are displaced in Myanmar due to the ongoing civil war across the country. Armed clashes, related to the enforcement of strict security measures, restrictions on access and threats against humanitarian workers, are increasing and continue to hamper humanitarian efforts across Myanmar, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Fighting is taking place in several regions of the country, from which the civilian population is also suffering greatly. That's why aid agencies are hoping an informal ceasefire agreement between the Arakan Liberation Army and Myanmar's armed forces will provide much-needed aid in Rakhine and Chin states, to which access has been restricted since September.

Aid workers, meanwhile, are concerned about the recently passed, very restrictive new NGO Registration Law, which will have a negative impact on IDPs. The Law on Registration of Organizations, which has been in force since the end of November, limits the possibilities of local associations to work with international partners. Many local NGOs will not register because they do not want to give legitimacy to the military junta. However, without registration they cannot legally do humanitarian work.

## **Argentina - Ignorance, discrimination and racism towards indigenous peoples must be fought by making their reality known**



(6-12-22) "The violence and harshness with which those who defend their right to the territory and to live according to their vision of the cosmos are repressed, as well as those who accompany such requests", are denounced by the Aboriginal National Pastoral Team (Endepa) of Argentina, at the end of the meeting during which the activities carried out in 2022 with the indigenous peoples were evaluated and the actions for 2023 were identified.

The meeting, held in La Bolsa (Córdoba) from December 2 to 4, saw the participation of representatives of diocesan teams from all over the country. After noting

the lack of consideration of the reality of the laws and the criminalization of demonstrations, the meeting's resolution reaffirms "the firm commitment to the threatened life of indigenous peoples", and the redoubling of efforts "to make their reality known, broadening our gaze and broadening our heart, so that in this Common House that we inhabit, there is room for all, feeling diversity as a richness and not as a threat".

### **Vatican appointee given police protection in India**

(6-12-22) A top court in the southern Indian state of Kerala has ordered police protection for the apostolic administrator of an archdiocese in the Eastern rite Syro-Malabar Church, which is embroiled in a bitter liturgical dispute.

The Kerala High Court granted the request made by Archbishop Andrews Thazhath in his petition on Dec. 5. The court also directed the police to remove the protesting priests and laity blocking his entry into the Archbishop's House.

The Vatican appointed Archbishop Thazhath as the apostolic administrator of the Ernakulam-Angamaly Archdiocese on July 30 to settle the more than five-decades-old liturgy dispute over the adoption of a Synod-ordered Mass requiring the priests to face the altar during the Eucharistic prayer. However, a group of priests and lay people in the archdiocese have taken control of the Archbishop's House since Nov. 21 and refused his access to it.

### **Christmas fundraiser in Malaysia for animal welfare**

(6-12-22) An animal rights group in Malaysia's Christian-majority Sarawak state organized a Christmas charity event to raise funds for the construction of a new village to offer better care to animals through a shelter.

Sarawak Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SSPCA) organized the annual Christmas Charity Carnival at the Association of Churches (ACS) Hall on Dec. 4, the *Borneo Post* reported on Dec. 5. The ACS is an ecumenical forum covering all Christian denominations in Sarawak.

### **Vietnam islanders welcome first resident priest**

(6-12-22) More than a thousand Catholics residing on remote islands off the north coast of Vietnam for decades have received their first resident priest.

Bishop Vincent Nguyen Van Ban of Hai Phong installed Father Augustin Hoang Ngoc Toan as the first pastor of Co To Parish based in the island district of Co To of Quang Ninh province on Dec. 1. Twenty-one priests from the province and Hai Phong joined the ceremony attended by hundreds of people. Local authorities also offered congratulations and flowers to Father Toan and the parish. Local people in traditional clothes played drums, clapped enthusiastically and offered Bishop Ban and Father Toan bouquets of bright flowers on arrival at St. Peter Church.

## **Myanmar junta arrests prominent Baptist leader**

(6-12-22) A prominent Kachin Baptist leader has been arrested by Myanmar's military junta while attempting to leave the country for Bangkok, Thailand for a medical examination.

Reverend Hkalam Samson, former head of the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC), was briefly detained for questioning at Mandalay International Airport on Dec. 4 and released on Dec. 5 after he was banned from leaving the country, according to local media reports citing sources monitoring the Baptist leader's arrest. Sources said he was rearrested in Myitkyina, capital of Kachin state, on Dec. 5 after he took a flight home from Mandalay.

## **Filipinos warned against Christmas fraudsters**

(6-12-22) Spike in cases prompts police, church officials to urge people to verify if groups are genuine before making donations. Police in the Philippines have warned people to remain vigilant against cyber criminals who use fake solicitation letters to dupe Christians into making donations for bogus Christmas projects. The Philippine National Police reported on Dec. 4 a spike in fraud cases of purported solicitation letters being circulated online by so-called Catholic foundations supposedly seeking to raise funds to provide Christmas gifts for the poor. The Catholic Church's social arm, Caritas, urged Catholics to verify every group asking for money before giving a donation.



7-12-22

## **Pope offers advice on confirming decisions prompted by Holy Spirit**

(7-12-22) Continuing his series of catechetical talks on discernment, at his weekly public audience of December 7, Pope Francis offered some advice on confirming that a decision is prompted by the Holy Spirit. The following is a summary of his talk:

In our continuing catechesis on discernment, we now turn to the signs that confirm the rightness of our decisions. The most important of these is the test of time. Decisions wisely discerned give rise to lasting peace. The spiritual life is "circular": our decisions, as the fruit of our interior freedom and openness to God's will, bring goodness, harmony and integration into our daily lives, our relationships and our work. A further sign of a spiritually sound decision is the conviction that it was in fact freely chosen out of love for God and in grateful response to his grace. The wisdom and rightness of our decisions is also confirmed by an increased sense of tranquillity, order and direction in our lives. For true wisdom, as the Bible teaches and the example of the saints bears witness, is born of the fear of God, the confident assurance that our lives are in his hands and that our human freedom finds its supreme fulfilment in trusting obedience to his will.

## **War is a sign of weakness, Pope tells peace organization**

(7-12-22) "We have realized that the human family, threatened by war, runs a more serious danger: the lack of will to build peace," Pope Francis said in an audience with Leaders pour la Paix [Leaders for Peace], a French organization founded by former French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin.

## **Pope calls for joint approach to tackle challenges of Mediterranean region**

(7-12-22) "This Conference has the merit of relaunching the centrality of the Mediterranean, through the exchange of an agenda that is particularly rich in topics ranging from themes of geopolitics and security to the protection of the fundamental freedoms of the person, the challenge of migration, and to the climate and environmental crises," Pope Francis wrote in his message to the Rome MED Dialogues Conference.

## **US State Department cites 12 nations for 'particularly severe' violations of religious freedom**



(7-12-22) “I am announcing designations against Burma, the People’s Republic of China, Cuba, Eritrea, Iran, Nicaragua, the DPRK [North Korea], Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan as Countries of Particular Concern under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom,” said Secretary of State Anthony Blinken.

“I am also placing Algeria, the Central African Republic, Comoros, and Vietnam on the Special Watch List for engaging in or tolerating severe violations of religious freedom,” he added.

### **Council of Cardinals discusses COP27, Synod progress, protection of young people**

(7-12-22) At meetings on December 6 and 7, the Council of Cardinals discussed several different topics: the COP27 conference on climate change; the continental phase of the Synod on Synodality; and the work of the Commission for the Protection of Minors.

### **Albanian president meets Pontiff**



(7-12-22) Pope Francis recently received President Bajram Begaj of Albania. The Southeastern European nation of 3.1 million is 59% Muslim, 19% Orthodox, and 18% Catholic; Pope Francis made an apostolic journey there in 2014. “His Holiness Pope Francis is a great friend of Albania and Albanians!” Begaj tweeted. We will be forever grateful to @pontifex for his role in pushing forward the religious harmony that exists in our country. Thank you, Your Holiness @pontifex, for being such a great force for peace and unity in times of conflict and divisions!”

### **New book collects papal appeals for peace in Ukraine; Pope pens preface**

(7-12-22) Francesco Antonio Grana, the Vatican reporter for the Rome-based newspaper *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, has gathered the Pope’s appeals for peace in Ukraine in a new book, *Un’enciclica sulla pace in Ucraina (An Encyclical on Peace in Ukraine)*.

In his preface to the book, Pope Francis writes that “we men of God who proclaim the Gospel of the Risen One have the duty to cry out this truth of faith: God is a God of peace, love, and hope. A God who wants us all to be brothers, as His Son Jesus Christ taught us. The horrors of war, of every war, offend the most holy name of God. And they offend Him even more if His name is abused to justify such unspeakable carnage.”

### **Authentic synodality does not lead to divisions in faith and morals, Assyrian church leader says (Fides)**

(7-12-22) The Fides news agency has interviewed Mar Awa III, the Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East. The church ceased to be in full communion with the Holy See following the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431).

Asked to comment on synods, the prelate said that authentic synodality “is more suitable to manifesting consensus around the depositum fidei [deposit of faith], and to guarding it together.” “An authentic synodal dynamic arises precisely from the fact that the bishops and all the baptized walk together in the same faith, and converge in seeking together the most suitable forms and practices to bear witness to the same faith in the present time,” he continued. “If the synodal dynamics express the path of the whole Church in the footsteps of the faith of the Apostles, they cannot be used to open divisions among the members of the Church on questions of faith or morals.”

### **Argentine pastoral team laments treatment of indigenous (Fides)**

(7-12-22) “It is with pain that we continue to see the high levels of ignorance, discrimination and racism that exist in society in general, reflecting a very negative image of indigenous peoples, expressed mainly in the media,” the Aboriginal National Pastoral Team of Argentina said at the conclusion of a meeting with the president of Argentina’s Episcopal Commission for Indigenous Pastoral Care.

The team also spoke of “the violence and harshness with which those who defend their right to the territory and to live according to their vision of the cosmos are repressed.”

### **Kazakhstan - A new Center for children with Down syndrome in Almaty, the result of "constructive dialogue" between the Church and civil institutions**

(7-12-22) "The new Center for children with Down syndrome in Almaty, inaugurated with the support of the municipal administration and the Samruk-Kazyna Trust Fund for the development of social projects, has become a reality. This allows us to bring our commitment to families and children with Down syndrome to a new level. It allows us to spread and strengthen, on a cultural and social level, the idea and practice of inclusiveness in Kazakhstan.



We want to say that no one should be left behind, especially the young and the vulnerable. Nobody is rejected by society". This is how Fr Guido Trezzani, a long-term missionary in Kazakhstan and National Director of Caritas in the Central Asian nation, presents to Agenzia Fides the new reception center that opened its doors in recent days in Almaty, thanks to the commitment of the Catholic community of the archdiocese and, in particular, its arm dedicated to social projects, Caritas.

Fr Trezzani adds: "Right now we are all very happy, parents, young people, volunteers, families, in particular the older Down children of the group. They now have a permanent workspace and a place to meet and communicate.

### **South Sudan - The answer to the prayers of the population arrives in the country that has never known peace**

(7-12-22) "The announcement of the Holy Father's visit is an answer to our prayer. The entire population of Sudan and South Sudan awaits the the Successor of Peter to come and step on the soil of our country." The Bishop of Tombura Yambio, South Sudan, Eduardo Hiiboro Kussala, reached by telephone by Agenzia Fides, commented on the imminent visit to the country, scheduled from 3 to 5 February, that Pope Francis will carry out together with the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, Primate of the Anglican Communion, and Pastor Iain Greenshields, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Bishop Kussala highlighted the importance of this ecumenical pilgrimage in the name of peace. "The fact that it is a visit marked by ecumenism, together with leaders of other churches, underlines the importance of wanting a united South Sudan, with all ethnic groups, communities and religious beliefs in harmony. It is a true call for unity and coexistence".

### **Cameroon - Three people detained in the US accused of financing separatist activities, including the kidnapping of Cardinal Tumi**

(7-12-22) The separatist conflict between the two regions of Cameroon has an international dimension that has not yet been fully revealed. Last week, the US Department of Justice arrested three US citizens of Cameroonian origin on charges of raising \$350,000 to purchase weapons and bomb-making materials for the Ambazonian Restoration Forces.

According to the Washington authorities, the funds collected were also used to finance various kidnappings, including that of Cardinal Christian Tumi, archbishop emeritus of Douala, kidnapped on November 5, 2020 and released after a brief detention.

Cardinal Tumi, who died in 2021, had tried on several occasions to mediate between the government and the separatists.

The Justice Department reported that Claude Chi, 40, a resident of Lee's Summit, Missouri; Francis Chenyi, 49, a resident of St. Paul, Minnesota; and Lah Nestor Langmi, 46, a resident of Buffalo, New York, were arrested on charges of conspiracy to provide material support for kidnapping and use of weapons of mass destruction in a foreign country.

"In addition to the more than \$350,000 raised by the defendants through voluntary donations, the prosecution alleges that Chi, Chenyi and Langmi conspired with others to kidnap civilians in Cameroon for ransom", the Justice Department statement said.

### **Indonesia parliament bans sex outside marriage**

(7-12-22) Indonesia's parliament approved legislation on 6 December that would outlaw sex outside marriage in a move critics said was a huge setback to rights in the world's most populous Muslim country.

A revision of Indonesia's criminal code, which stretches back to the Dutch colonial era, had been debated for decades. Rights groups protested against the amendments, denouncing them as a crackdown on civil liberties and political freedoms as well as a shift towards fundamentalism in Muslim-majority Indonesia, where the constitution recognizes five religions alongside Islam. The article criminalizing sex outside marriage has been criticized by Indonesian business organizations as detrimental to tourism, though authorities insist foreigners traveling to Bali would not be affected. The new code, which still needs to be approved by President Joko Widodo, will come into force after three years.

Meanwhile, an Catholic priest has joined human rights activists in criticizing the new criminal code approved by Indonesia's parliament outlawing sex outside of marriage.

Divine Word Father Otto Gusti Madung, a lecturer of philosophy and human rights at the Institute of Philosophy and Creative Technology in Flores, East Nusa Tenggara province, called the parliament's decision "a setback to protecting the liberal rights of citizens which includes the guarantee of human dignity." He said the move was part of an effort to incorporate religious morality into the law.

He said it is a moral imperative that sex between two individuals may only be carried out after marriage according to the religion they follow.

However, sex outside of marriage is also a private moral issue that can be resolved by religions or individual personal moral considerations in the case of non-religious people and hence should not be regulated by civil laws, he added.

### **Indian fishermen call off anti-port protest for now**

(7-12-22) A marathon protest by Indian fishermen led by a Catholic archdiocese against an upcoming international seaport has been temporarily called off after a consensus was reached with the provincial government.

Father Eugene Pereira, vicar-general of the Latin Archdiocese of Trivandrum and convener of the 140-day-old protest, made the announcement after meeting Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Dec. 6. "For now we are calling it off. Protests do not always come to an end only after achieving their objectives. Each protest has several phases. One such phase of the protest has ended in a consensus," Fr Pereira told reporters. Father Pereira though looked upset and said the decision did not mean "they were satisfied with the steps taken or promises made by the state government" while adding that "it's only a temporary truce."

The government has promised to meet most demands of the protesters. The government, however, refused to accept the original demands of the protesters which included halting the port's construction for three months and allowing their representatives in an official panel of experts to study the environmental and human impact of the project.

Cardinal Baselios Cleemis, archbishop of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, reportedly played the mediator between the protesters and the government after violence flared in the last week of November.

### **Renewed calls for Myanmar junta to end death penalty**



(7-12-22) The Myanmar junta's recent handing down of the death sentence on university students has prompted renewed calls for the international community to pressure the military regime to end capital punishment.

Seven students from Yangon's Dagon University who reportedly participated in anti-coup protests and resistance to the junta were among the 10 prisoners who received the death penalty last week from grossly unjust closed-door trials.

UN Human Rights Chief Volker Turk has expressed shock that more than 130 people have now been sentenced to death by military courts behind closed doors following fresh convictions last week.

"The military continues to hold proceedings in secretive courts in violation of basic principles of fair trial and contrary to core judicial guarantees of independence and impartiality," Turk said.

He also called for the suspension of all executions and a return to a moratorium on the death penalty. Rights groups have urged the junta to immediately commute the death sentences recently slapped on 10 prisoners and to impose a moratorium on the death penalty with the aim of abolishing capital punishment in the country.

8-12-22

*Equation 1reuters*

### **Pope Francis breaks down and cries while mentioning Ukraine at public prayer**

(8-12-22) "Immaculate Virgin, today I would have wanted to bring you the thanks of the Ukrainian people (for peace)," Pope Francis said during the annual act of veneration of Mary Immaculate in Rome's Piazza di Spagna. "Instead, once again I have to bring you the pleas of children, of the elderly, of fathers and mothers, of the young people of that martyred land, which is suffering so much."



### **Pope urges faithful to entrust and consecrate themselves to Mary**

(8-12-22) "We have good news: Mary, the only human being in history without sin, is with us in the battle, she is our sister and, above all, our Mother," Pope Francis said on December 8, during his Angelus address for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. "And we, who struggle to choose good, can entrust ourselves to her."

The Pope continued, "By entrusting ourselves, consecrating ourselves to Mary, we say to her: 'Take me by the hand, Mother, guide me: with you I will have more strength in the battle against evil; with you I will rediscover my original beauty.'"

"Let us entrust ourselves to Mary today, let us entrust ourselves to Mary every day, repeating to her: 'Mary, I entrust my life to you, I entrust my family, my work, I entrust my heart and my struggles. I consecrate myself to you,'" he added. "May Mary Immaculate help us to safeguard our beauty from evil."

### **Indonesia's criminal code revision seem 'incompatible' with rights: UN**

(8-12-22) Parts of Indonesia's revised criminal code appear "incompatible" with fundamental freedoms and human rights, the United Nations said on 8 December.

The sweeping overhaul includes a ban on sex outside marriage and the cohabitation of unmarried couples, which activists have said are a major threat to the LGBTQ community's rights in Indonesia.

There are also updates to offenses related to blasphemy -- already a crime in Muslim-majority Indonesia -- while journalists could face punishment for publishing news "that could incite unrest".

The UN "notes with concern the adoption of certain provisions in the revised Criminal Code that appear to be incompatible with fundamental freedoms and human rights," its office in Indonesia said in a statement.

### **Indian bishops ask govt. not to oppose quotas for Dalit Christians**



(8-12-22) Catholic bishops in the southern Indian state of Kerala have appealed to the federal government to reconsider its opposition to extending reservation benefits to Christians and Muslims of Dalit origin.

The Kerala Catholic Bishops Council (KCBC) passed a unanimous resolution at Ernakulam on Dec. 7, which will be presented to the government run by the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party in the capital New Delhi. "We will submit our resolution to the federal government," KCBC spokesperson Father Jacob Palakappilly said while hoping "it will take a favorable stand towards the genuine demand for reservations."

The Supreme Court is currently hearing a batch of petitions seeking the removal of the religious criteria for granting reservations to all Dalits, which will ensure those who follow Christianity or Islam a share in the 15 percent reserved quota in parliament and state legislatures, government jobs and education. At present, these benefits are extended only to Dalits belonging to the Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhist religions.

Church leaders believe that the federal government's submission in the top court opposing the petitions would further delay justice for Dalit Christians and Muslims. "The constitution does not discriminate [against] anyone based on religion, therefore, they should be given benefits of reservations," Father Palakappilly told UCA News on Dec. 8.



### **Catholic group embraces HIV patients in the Philippines**

(8-12-22) A Catholic foundation in the Philippines launched on Dec. 6 a programme that would welcome HIV patients by forming support groups and offer guidance counseling while under medication. The Catholics for AIDS Foundation, established by a group of overseas Filipino workers in 1992, opened its first center in Manila that would serve as a meeting place where HIV patients can interact with one another.

The foundation recently purchased a building to hold counseling sessions as well as to conduct meetings and classes for HIV patients who need counseling or psychological assistance in dealing with their disease. "We want this place to be known as a haven for those who want to know more about HIV and AIDS, as well as how to deal with the virus, if they have already been infected. Here, we suspend judgment against one another. Here, we simply show our love and concern for one another," the foundation's executive chairman Ronald Hadakon told UCA News.

9-12-22

### **House passes same-sex marriage bill**

(9-12-22) In a 258-169 vote, the US House of Representatives has passed the Senate's version of the so-called Respect for Marriage Act, which prohibits states from defining marriage as the union of a man and a woman and raises significant religious liberty concerns.

The US Conference of Catholic Bishops opposed the legislation, which President Biden is expected to sign into law.

### **Papal support for Jewish-Catholic project for social justice**

(9-12-22) "When we say these things about justice, which the prophets keep repeating: about the orphan, the widow, the stranger, the poor, isn't it true? They tell you that you are a communist," the Pope said to a delegation from the Latin American Rabbinical Seminary.

"And look, they say to me: 'This Pope, instead of talking about God, is talking about social issues,'" he continued. "And they go together: justice, the justice of the heart, throughout the Bible, is always with God and with our neighbor. They go together. In other words, worship and serve, worship and help."

### **Give joyful witness and lobby hard for families, Pope tells Italian groups**

(9-12-22) “The witness of being a family is a joyful gift that inspires gratitude,” Pope Francis said in a recent audience with members of the Forum of Family Associations.

The Pope praised the Forum for supporting “good policy for families and with families. You do so not by starting out from a particular ideology, but on the basis of the social doctrine and praxis of the Church.”

Good public policy on families, the Pope continued, is “the only path to reach an inversion in the trend of low birth rates. We are here in a severe, very severe demographic winter.” He added, “Think and act politically beyond party affiliations.”

### **Nigerian bishop raps slow government response to Pentecost massacre**

(9-12-22) Six months after the terrorist attack that left 39 Catholics dead and more than 80 wounded at a parish church of Nigeria’s Ondo diocese, Bishop Femi Ajakaye reports that the government’s promises to find and arrest the killers have produced no results. Although some suspects have been arrested, prosecutors have not proceeded with the case. “Nigeria is still waiting,” the bishop said.

### **France blocks web site promoting surrogate motherhood**

(9-12-22) The government of France has ordered an internet hosting company to block a Spanish web site that promotes surrogate motherhood: a practice that is illegal in France.

The Court of Cassation ruled that the site is “intended to allow French people to have access to an illegal practice in France since the information on this website was accessible in French, the company claimed to work with French clients, and the French public was the target of this site.”

### **Niger’s president meets Pontiff**

(9-12-22) Pope Francis received Mohamed Bazoum, the president of Niger since 2021. The West African nation of 23.6 million is 96% Muslim and nearly 4% ethnic religionist. President Bazoum and senior Vatican diplomatic officials discussed education in Niger and regional concerns about migration and security. In 2009, a jihadist insurgency began in Niger, pitting the government—backed by France and the US—against Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.

President Bazoum tweeted about the meeting, but did not comment on it.



### **Papal meeting with Lviv mayor, blessing for rehab project for people maimed in missile attacks**

(9-12-22) Following his December 7 general audience, Pope Francis met Mayor Andrii Sadovy of Lviv (Ukraine) and Oleg Samchuk, director of a rehabilitation center. They “presented the Pontiff with a cross made from metal fragments taken from the injuries of children wounded in the war in Ukraine,” according to the report.

### **Uganda - Ration cuts and price increases seriously affect refugees in Uganda**

(9-12-22) The living conditions of refugees continue to worsen due to the sharp reductions in food rations and the increase in prices. Sister Laura Gemignani, a Comboni missionary working in Kanawat, diocese of Kotido in Karamoja, a 10-hour drive from Kampala, confirms the precarious situation of hundreds of thousands of refugees. Contacted by phone while she was on her way to Kampala, the missionary confirmed that the sisters collaborate in Yoro, near a camp called Rhino kamp, where they take care of children who hope to enter the village and make a greater contribution to all.

“There are 130,000 displaced people, 80% women and children”, explains Sister Laura. “We are organizing ourselves to go there permanently, we have found water, we have to build a house for the two Ugandan sisters and a health centre”, with the hope that funds will arrive that can also be used for

this emergency.

Uganda hosts more refugees than any other African nation, with almost 1.5 million people fleeing conflict in countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), South Sudan and Somalia. Now, due to the dire food emergency, many are considering returning to their countries of origin, as a shortage of funds forces the World Food Program (WFP) to cut rations for the third time in the last three years.



### **Mongolia - The school in the village of Zuunmod educates the little ones with Don Bosco's "Preventive System"**

(9-12-22) This year, 30 children are attending the "St Paul" school, run by the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, in the Mongolian village of Zuunmod, capital of the province of Tov. A school that is a significant presence in a context where most of the children come from families whose daily life is marked by strong social difficulties. In Zuunmod, work is a mirage. There are very few stable employment opportunities. Families live on subsidies that the

government distributes each month to support children from 0 to 18 years old (about 100 million tugrik, the Mongolian currency, corresponding to 313 euros). But there are those who use this to buy alcohol for themselves, while children lack the means to take bath. The Pontifical Society of the Holy Childhood supports the school financially.

The children arrive in the morning, have breakfast and begin their school and play activities. The day continues with lunch and, for some, after school, which is also open to the children of the village who do not attend school. The after-school programme also helps children to do some extracurricular activities. The system and activities follow Don Bosco's 'Preventive System.'

### **Peru - "The defense of democracy is the right and duty of peoples and citizens": Dina Boluarte new President of the Republic**

(9-12-22) The President of Peru, Pedro Castillo, who had called new elections and decreed a state of emergency, has been dismissed by Parliament, which has called on Vice President Dina Boluarte to succeed him, in accordance with the Constitution, who has sworn in, thus becoming the first woman to lead the country. Castillo was arrested for "crimes against the State and the constitutional order".

The events occurred in a few hours on the afternoon of Wednesday, December 7.

The bishops of Peru, in a statement, rejected "in an energetic and absolute way, the rupture of the constitutional order." They also affirmed that "it is the right and duty of the peoples and citizens to defend democracy." Citing the current Political Constitution (No. 46), they also recalled that obedience should not be owed to a usurping government or to those who assume public functions in violation of the Constitution and its laws.

Next, the bishops urged the country's protective institutions to "fully assume their constitutional functions of protecting and safeguarding democracy, guaranteeing, preserving and restoring public and constitutional order." Finally, the statement calls to "maintain national unity, calm and to put an end to any form of violence and violation of the fundamental rights of citizens" in these difficult times.

### **Filipino women march to end domestic violence**

(9-12-22) About 250 women marched on the Philippine capital Manila on Dec. 8 to mark the Catholic Church's solemnity of the Immaculate Conception by calling for an end to rising domestic violence. Members of the *Samahan ng mga Kababaihan Laban sa Opresyon* (Women's Group against Oppression) including those who claimed to have been abused by their spouses, gathered outside the Commission on Human Rights to press home their demands.

The women want greater legal protection such as higher and faster conviction rates of perpetrators. They also demanded that the commission investigate cases of marital rape, which although outlawed in the Philippines, enforcement is often seen as lacking.

The women's group claimed that although there were "good" laws to protect women's rights, the present conviction rate is low.

### **Indonesian Catholics wary after terrorist's release**

(9-12-22) The Indonesian Bishops' Conference (KWI) has called on Catholics to be on their guard after the government released a jailed terrorist behind a string of bomb attacks, including against Christians, two decades ago.

"We do not need to worry too much. But we must stay alert ahead of Christmas. We must pay serious attention to our own internal security. We must tighten it. It is better to prevent something bad from happening than it is to deal with it after it has happened," Father Paulus Christian Siswantoko, the conference's executive secretary told UCA News on Dec. 8.

The priest, a former executive secretary of the KWI's Commission for Justice and Peace, said Hisyam bin Alizeon, better known as Umar Patek, "is a high-profile terror convict who played a big role and might still have [ill-intentioned] subordinates waiting for his release."

Patek, a member of the Jemaah Islamiyah terror group, was freed on Dec. 7 after serving just over half of a 20-year sentence in a prison in Surabaya, East Java.

### **Korean religious groups seek to dispel Islam fears**

(9-12-22) An interfaith group in South Korea organized a seminar to help people clear misconceptions about Islam, including the wearing the *hijab*, to forge better ties with the minority faith in the country. The Korean Religious Peace Conference (KCRP) held a public seminar on the dialogue between Korean religions and Islam titled "Islam: Approaching Peaceful Coexistence and Future" from Dec. 5-6 in the capital Seoul, *the Catholic Times* reported on Dec. 7.

In his opening address, Kim Dong-eok, president of the Korean Muslim Association, emphasized that Islam is a "religion of peace." "There are people who misunderstand the true meaning of Islam in Korean society. I hope that many people will understand and cooperate with Korean Islam through this seminar," said Kim.

### **'Church in Myanmar is wounded, displaced,' cardinal says**

(9-12-22) Cardinal Charles Bo of Yangon says the Church in Myanmar is wounded and displaced as thousands of people are forced to flee their homes, villages are burned and churches are destroyed amid the conflict triggered by last year's military coup.

"The people of Myanmar have been suffering from the Covid pandemic and political instability for the last two years and thousands of people are homeless and seeking refuge in the camps," Cardinal Bo said in his homily at the ordination of two Salesians held at the Shrine of Mary Help of Christians in Nazareth Apostolate School, Anesakahan, near Pyin-Oo-Lwin, on Dec. 8.

"Amid the darkness and the suffering, the Church is wounded, the Church is displaced," he said. The cardinal, who is also the head of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar, has called for peace, dialogue and reconciliation in the beleaguered Southeast Asian nation. "The only thing we need in Myanmar is love, reconciliation," he said, urging Catholics to pray for the country and lend a hand to those most in need regardless of race and religion.

The cardinal, however, did not mention the military's arson attacks on villages including his own.

### **Pope honours Filipino catechists, lay leaders**

(9-12-22) The Vatican has conferred a prestigious papal award on 14 Filipino laypeople, mostly catechists and community leaders, for their selfless services to the Church and society.



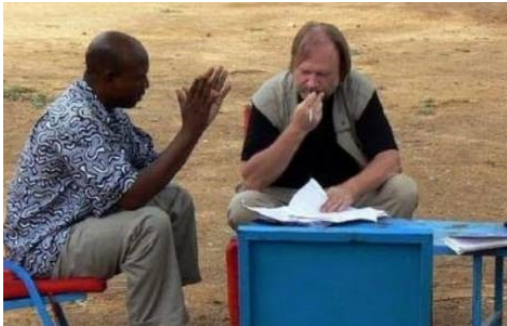


The award, *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* (“for the Church and the Pope”), the highest honor the pope can bestow to Catholic clergy and laypeople, was presented to the 14 in Batangas province, south of the capital Manila, on Dec. 7.

Many of the awardees have served the Church for decades, said an official from the Archdiocese of Lipa. “This award was conferred for their distinguished service to the Catholic Church ... It is a permanent distinction given by the Holy Father himself to recognize the good works of individuals in the service to the Catholic Church,” Lipa Archbishop Gilbert Garcera told UCA News.

They received the award — gold medals with images of the Apostles Peter and Paul — during a Holy Mass celebrated by the archbishop together with many other clergymen from the archdiocese.

10-12-22



### **Mali - German humanitarian activist released after four and a half years of hostage detention**

(10-12-22) German aid worker Jörg Lange has been released after four and a half years of hostage detention. According to information from Der SPIEGEL, the Moroccan secret services in Mali acted as intermediaries for the release of the 63-year-old man. Lange is doing well, but must now be brought back to Germany as quickly as possible. They report that the man was first handed over on December 8 and then was taken to the

German embassy in Bamako, the Malian capital, where he was picked up by officials from the Bundeskriminalamt (BKA).

The case dates back to April 11, 2018, when Lange, who headed the private humanitarian organization “Help” in Niger, was attacked and kidnapped by unknown persons on motorcycles in the region of Tillabéri, on the border with Mali. His Nigerian driver was released soon after. German authorities assume that Lange was first kidnapped by a criminal group, but was then likely sold to the Islamist terrorist group “Islamic State in the Greater Sahara” (ISGS).

### **Iraq - Christian-Shiite dialogue Conference scheduled for March 2023, two years after the Pope's visit**

(10-12-22) In March 2023, two years after the apostolic visit to Iraqi land, Iraq will host a Christian-Shiite dialogue Conference. The initiative will involve high Christian and Shiite representatives and it will take place between Baghdad and the Shiite holy city of Najaf and will be an opportunity of a meeting and exchange of views in the wake of the historic meeting that took place on March 6, 2021 in Najaf between the Bishop of Rome and Ayatollah al-Sistani. On the afternoon of Friday, December 9, a delegation of authoritative Shiite scholars from Najaf were received in Baghdad by Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako, Patriarch of the Chaldean Church.

The meeting - according to the media - provided the opportunity for a discussion on the contents that will be at the centre of the Conference and on some organizational details.

### **Pope to seminarians: Live a life of prayer and thanksgiving**

(10-12-22) Meeting seminarians and community members of the *Seminario Conciliar de Barcelona* at the Vatican on Saturday 10 December, Pope Francis encouraged the seminarians to bring God's love to the world through their personal witness and ministry.

During the time of formation, the Pope pointed out that there can be two temptations in particular that need to be faced. The first is a tendency to focus only on negative situations or experiences, while the second is to try to propose an idea of the world that is “idyllic and unreal” for people to relate to or understand.

He recalled that the first obligation of a priest is to live a life of prayer that springs from thanksgiving for the love and attention God has shown the priest in calling him to His service, i.e. “making Him

present in the Eucharist, in the sacraments, in the Word, so that He is born in the hearts of men and women." The Pope also recalled that the Lord asks us for "the sacrifice of the heart" and renouncing our own will, as the Lord does in Gethsemane.

The gift of the Holy Spirit accompanies the priest in his journey and vocation of being priests of Christ, the Pope said. He encouraged the seminarians from Barcelona to always savour and remember this love the Lord has poured out on them by calling them to this vocation, a love He will pour abundantly into their hearts, in their ordination and in the rest of their days.

11-12-22

### **Pope: Advent offers us a time to know the Lord in new ways**

At the Angelus on the third Sunday of Advent, Pope Francis welcomed families with their children, who brought little statuettes of the Child Jesus to be blessed on this day, a tradition Saint Pope Paul VI started over fifty years ago.

He shared his reflections on the Gospel of the day which talks of John the Baptist who while in prison sends his disciples to ask Jesus if He really is the Messiah. It looks as if John had wondered whether Jesus was the messiah. We need to always be open to surprise about how God works and how His actions are different from how we would presume they would be, exceeding our needs and expectations, the Pope emphasized.



*"Preparing the Nativity display for the Infant Jesus, we learn again who our Lord is; a time to leave behind certain mindsets and prejudices about God and our brothers and sisters; a time in which, instead of thinking about gifts for ourselves, we can give words and gestures of consolation to those who are wounded, as Jesus did with the blind, the deaf and the lame."*

The Pope then greeted the children present in the square and wished them and their families a blessed Christmas. He blessed the figurines of the Child Jesus they brought with them that they will then place in their own Christmas nativity scenes back home.

There was an invitation to pray for peace, peace particularly in Ukraine: "I invite you to pray, before the creche, that the Nativity of the Lord will bring a ray of peace to children all over the world, especially those forced to live the terrible and dark days of war, this war in Ukraine that destroys



many lives, so many lives, and many children."

Pope Francis asked for **prayers for South Sudan** as armed conflict escalates in the country's Upper Nile state forcing thousands of people to flee their homes. His appeal comes as he prepares to undertake an ecumenical pilgrimage of peace to the East African country.

"Today is **International Mountain Day**," said Pope Francis speaking after the Sunday Angelus, an observance "which invites us to

recognise this wonderful resource for the life of the planet and humanity."

The theme of the International Day was "Women move mountains." *"It is true," the Pope said, "women move mountains! And this reminds us of the role of women in caring for the environment, in preserving the traditions of mountain peoples. From mountain people we learn the sense of community, to walk together."*

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**"You have to be patient; do not lose heart, because the Lord's coming will be soon."** (St James 5:8)