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6-2-23



Pope Francis criticizes those who have ‘exploited’ Pope Benedict’s death

(6-2-23) Returning to Rome from South Sudan, Pope Francis was joined by the leaders of the Church of England and Church of Scotland at his in-flight press conference. The Pope described the arms trade as a “plague” and said that God accompanies persons with same-sex attractions.

“I believe that Benedict’s death has been exploited by people who want to add grist to their mill,” he added, as he said he “was able to talk about everything with Pope Benedict. [Also] to change opinion. He was always by my side, supporting me, and if he had any issue, he would tell me and we would talk.”

“And those who exploit such a good person, such a man of God, I would say a holy father of the Church, well I would say they are unethical people, they are people belonging to a party, not to the Church,” Pope Francis continued. “You can see everywhere the tendency to make theological views parties. These things will fall on their own, or if they don’t, they will go on as has happened many times in the history of the Church. I wanted to say clearly who Pope Benedict was: he was not embittered.”

Archbishop of Canterbury: division among Christians is ‘abnormal’

(6-2-23) The Archbishop of Canterbury said that divisions among Christians are “abnormal,” as he spoke with reporters on the return flight after he and Pope Francis made an “ecumenical pilgrimage of peace” to South Sudan.

Reflecting on the progress of ecumenism, Dr. Marcus Welby said: “God has done everything that makes it possible for us to reconcile. It is only human pride that resists it.”

The Anglican leader said that the joint appeal for peace that he made along with Pope Francis (and with the Presbyterian Moderator of the Church of Scotland) should be seen as a normal exercise of Christian leadership. “We need constantly to be reminded... that the normal is for the Church to work as one,” he said. “The abnormal is for us to compete.”

Pope still hopes to visits Ukraine, Russia

(6-2-23) Pope Francis said that he remains hopeful that he will be able to meet both Russia’s President Vladimir Putin and Ukraine’s Volodymyr Zelenskyy, in their respective countries.

The Pope told reporters on February 5 that he is looking for a “small window to negotiate” with the two leaders, in hopes of ending the war in Ukraine.

He said that his effort would involve a visit to both countries, and he is still waiting for a positive response from Russia. “If I didn’t go to Kyiv, it’s because it was not possible at that moment to go to Moscow,” he said.

Vatican foreign minister: Pope wants to meet with Patriarch Kirill, but in peaceful conditions

(6-2-23) Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, the Holy See’s Secretary for Relations with States and International Organizations, told *Tass* that Pope Francis would like to meet the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, but not during the war. Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill met in Havana in 2016; a subsequent meeting was canceled after the Russian invasion.

Catholicism must reckon with the risks of a ‘Saffron Taliban’ in India

(6-2-23) “Saffronization,” the report notes, refers to India’s transformation “from a multi-cultural state, in which identity is premised on citizenship, into a Hindu-dominated society in which national and religious identity are intertwined.”

New convent beckons Christians to return to Iraq

(6-2-23) In 2014, the Islamic State destroyed Batnaya, a Chaldean Catholic village in northern Iraq. "Your name and identity are in Batnaya and your roots are in Batnaya, not in the places of emigration," Archbishop Paul Thabet said of those who had to flee, but have not returned. "I also encourage you to support the village and be present in it, because otherwise these roots will dry up, and if that happens then the branches will surely die."

Pope grieving for victims of quakes in Turkey and Syria

(6-2-23) Pope Francis says he is deeply saddened to learn of the huge loss of life caused by a powerful earthquake that has struck south-eastern Turkey and north-western Syria. The 7.8 magnitude earthquake rocked wide swaths of the neighbouring countries early Monday morning 6 February toppling hundreds of buildings and killing thousands of people.

In two separate telegrams signed on his behalf by Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Pope offered words of condolence and asked the apostolic nuncios, Marek Solczynski in Turkey, and Mario Zenari in Syria, to send his assurance of his spiritual closeness to all those affected.

Likewise, he said he "prays that the emergency personnel will be sustained in their care of the injured and in the ongoing relief efforts by the divine gifts of fortitude and perseverance."

The Pope also expressed a "renewed sign of his spiritual solidarity" for the "long-suffering Syrian people."

The epicenter of the earthquake – which struck at 04:17 local time - was located near Gaziantep, an important industrial and manufacturing district close to the Turkey-Syria border.

(9-2-23) As of 9 February evening, the number of dead has exceeded 19,000.

President of Malawi lauds Church's 'enormous socioeconomic impact'

(6-2-23) The President of Malawi has lauded "the enormous socioeconomic impact" of the initiatives that the Catholic Church has undertaken in the Southeastern African nation.

In his message following a meeting with the Apostolic Nuncio to Malawi and Zambia,

Archbishop Gianfranco Gallone, President Lazarus McCarthy Chakwera said that his government will continue to collaborate with the Church to improve livelihoods.

"I have restated my administration's satisfaction with the enormous socioeconomic impact the Roman Catholic Church has had in this country for decades through a number of interventions in various key sectors of human development," President Chakwera says in a Wednesday, February 1 Facebook message.

The Malawian President disclosed the purpose of the meeting, saying, "The main thrust of our discussion was on consolidating the cordial working partnership between the government of Malawi and the Roman Catholic Church."

DR Congo - New demonstrations in Goma as M23 rebels advance

(6-2-23) Today, February 6th, protests broke out again in Goma, capital of North Kivu (eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo), Barricades in the streets, where demonstrations that began on February 3 continue (see Fides, 3/2/2023) to ask the Regional Force of the Community of West African Member States to take action to stop the advance of the M23 rebels.

South Sudan - Doctors with Africa Cuamm: peace also passes through taking care of people's health

(6-2-23) "South Sudan is a mother that dies at about 20 years of age, due to a birth gone wrong, because assisted only by her grandmother, in her hut made of earth and mud. Two babies born at home, a third to be delivered, and no one who bothers to go to the hospital or health centre. South Sudan is a little girl, about 2 years old, who weighs 8.5 kilograms, is bloated, cannot even open her legs and eyes. She has a very severe form of malnutrition. South Sudan are dads who walk for days, kilometers and kilometers, to bring their sick children to the first available hospital and who too often

arrive late". These are the real data provided directly to Fides by Elisa Bissacco of the Media Relations Sector of Doctors with Africa Cuamm.

"I will never forget the faces of the children I cared for, the looks of the mothers crouching under their children's beds, the silence of the relatives of the sick who sat on the veranda outside the hospital waiting, hoping and their pain when I communicated that their loved one had not made it", says Francesca, a Cuamm nurse.

We chose to go the last mile, to the farthest place, where no one wants to go, to those peripheries of the world so dear to Pope Francis, who is now rekindling hope with his just-concluded visit".

The same is the story recounted by doctors of Africa CUAMM.

Says Bissacco: "The road ahead for South Sudan to become a country where people live in dignity is still very long. We really hope that the Pope's trip will be the first stone laid to rebuild peace, because only then can every problem find a solution."

Syria - Aleppo, Bishop Audo: after 12 years of war, the earthquake falls on us like a new bomb, in Turkey churches too are destroyed

(6-2-23) "Now it is even more important to be close to the people, who are terrorized by this earthquake". For Jesuit Antoine Audo, Chaldean Bishop of Aleppo, "among the many we have had, this is a disaster that, so to speak, we are not used to. After 12 years of war, this is a new tremendous bomb, lethal and unknown, which falls on us."

The earthquake that shook southern Turkey and north-central Syria at 4:17 a.m. local time on Monday, February 6, is the most violent in eight centuries.

The Chaldean Bishop of Aleppo describes "a city of two and a half million inhabitants without electricity, water and heating. It is very cold, winter is harsh. I see people in the streets or in cars. They are afraid, they do not know what will happen, because it may not be over, and there are rumors that new strong and devastating tremors may follow". In Turkey, Bishop Paolo Bizzeti, Apostolic Vicar of Anatolia, reported that Iskenderun Cathedral has collapsed, and churches of the Syrian Orthodox and Orthodox communities in that city have also been destroyed. "Here in Aleppo", Bishop Audo reports to Fides, "Melkite Archbishop Georges Masri has been pulled alive from the rubble, but his Vicar is still under the destroyed building, and they still have not found him".

Peru - Open letter from the bishops to the members of Congress: "Do not turn your back, listen to the cry of all the Peruvian people"

(6-2-23) The Peruvian Congress has rejected a new bill to bring forward general elections to the end of this year, which also included a referendum on the creation of a Constituent Assembly. After this new rejection, the Presidency of the Peruvian Bishops' Conference issued an "Open Letter" addressed to the 130 members of the Congress of the Republic, in which it first recalls the bishops' previous pronouncements calling for dialogue, prayer and peace and asks them: "Our brothers from all over Peru, whose representatives are in Congress, are questioning you. Have you listened to their demands? Peruvians need to be heard in their just social demands, but at the same time they need peace that allows them to continue working to survive. Do not turn your back on them and listen to the cry of all the Peruvian people".

(4-2-23) On February 4, 2023, the Holy Father accepted the resignation from the pastoral care of the **diocese of Tanjore, India, presented by Bishop Devadass Ambrose Mariadoss.**

India - Appointment of Bishop of Buxar, James Shekhar

(4-2-23) On February 4, 2023, the Holy Father appointed the Reverend James Shekhar, of the clergy of Patna, until now (2016-2023) deputy secretary of the Episcopal Council of Bihar, Jharkhand and Andaman, as bishop of the diocese of Buxar, India.

Msgr. James Shekhar was born on 23 September 1967 in Singamparai, Tamil Nadu, in the diocese of Palayamkottai. He was ordained a priest on 26 May 1996 and incardinated in the archdiocese of

Patna. As a priest, he has been a parish priest, director of youth pastoral care for the archdiocese, and teacher in the seminary. After his doctorate in Biblical theology at the University of Innsbruck in Austria, he served as secretary of the archbishop of Patna till 2015.

India – Appointment of bishop of Nongstoin

(4-2-23) On February 4, 2023, the Holy Father appointed the Reverend Wilbert Marwein, of the clergy of Nongstoin, India, hitherto vicar general and parish priest in Nonbah, as bishop of the diocese of Nongstoin.

Msgr. Wilbert Marwein was born on 17 February 1970 in Rangblang-Sohsyniang, in the archdiocese of Shillong. He was ordained a priest on 27 April 2003, first for the archdiocese of Shillong and then incardinated in the new diocese of Nongstoin. Following ordination, he served as deputy parish priest in Ummulong (2003-2005) and bursar of Oriens Theological College in Shillong. He then studied for a licentiate in missiology at the Pontifical Urban University in Rome and held the roles of deputy parish priest of Santa Maria in Cosenza, Italy and, since 2015, vicar general and parish priest in Nonbah, Nongstoin.

7-2-23

Report: More than 360M Christians suffer high levels of persecution, discrimination

(7-2-23) Open Doors, an organization that assists persecuted Christians, has released its annual World Watch List.

According to the report, 1 in 7 Christians face high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith, and 5,621 Christians were killed for their faith last year. The ten nations with the highest levels of persecution are North Korea, Somalia, Yemen, Eritrea, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and Sudan.

4 priests, 2 seminarians in Nicaragua sentenced to decade in prison

(7-2-23) As the regime of Daniel Ortega continues its persecution of the Church, the priests and seminarians were sentenced for treason and “spreading false news.”

US Senate passes resolution honoring Catholic schools

(7-2-23) By unanimous consent, the US Senate has passed a resolution supporting the contributions of Catholic schools in the US. A similar resolution awaits action in the House of Representatives. In a recent letter, Bishop Thomas Daly of Spokane, the chairman of the bishops’ Committee on Catholic Education, praised the resolutions’ sponsors, Rep. Darin LaHood (R-IL) and Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL).

Pope to visit Mongolia?

(7-2-23) Pope Francis said that he might visit Mongolia in the fall, during his exchanges with reporters on his return flight from Africa to Rome.

The Pontiff said that “there is the possibility” of a voyage to Mongolia in September, after a visit to Marseille, France, for a September 9 meeting of bishops from the Mediterranean region.

Mongolia is a mission territory, with the entire country covered by the apostolic prefecture of Ulan Bator, under the guidance of Cardinal Giorgio Marengo. There are only about 1,300 Catholics in the country, in a population of over 3 million.

Cardinal Marengo, a Consolata missionary, was a surprise choice by Pope Francis to receive a red hat in the consistory of August 2022. At 48 he is the world’s youngest cardinal.

Church and state spar over taxes for noted guest facility in Jerusalem

(7-2-23) Israeli authorities have frozen the bank accounts of the Notre Dame Institute of Jerusalem, in the latest clash over taxation of church properties.

Although churches and shrines are exempt from taxes, Israel has sought to collect taxes on church-

owned institutions that offer commercial services. The Notre Dame Institute, located just outside the Old City, is a prime choice for pilgrims and tourists, offering 142 guest rooms as well as restaurant, banquet, and conference facilities.

The city of Jerusalem is seeking more than \$5 million in taxes from the Institute. Local hotel owners have strongly backed that demand, complaining about unfair competition.

Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church moves away from Russian-affiliated Julian calendar

(7-2-23) The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, among the largest of the Eastern Catholic churches, will now celebrate Christmas on December 25.

Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk said that the bishops were surprised to find wide support for the change among the laity, and that the bishops are "leaving the possibility to remain on the old calendar for those who aren't ready."

Vatican dismisses Italian nuns from religious life after real-estate dispute

(7-2-23) The Vatican has dismissed two Poor Clare sisters from religious life, after they refused to leave a convent that had been ordered to close.

The Dicastery for Religious ordered the closing of Convent of St. Clare in Ravello, Italy, in 2021, because the Poor Clare community had become so small. Hoping to stave off the closing, the two nuns offered the property to the Vatican, asking in return to be allowed to stay. The Vatican accepted the property but insisted that the nuns leave.

The convent and its associated property, located on the scenic Amalfi coast, has an estimated market value of over \$50 million.

Vandals cause 'extensive damage' at Australian Catholic school

(7-2-23) The school, O'Loughlin Catholic College, is located near Darwin, the capital of Australia's Northern Territory. The territory's education minister said she was "saddened and disappointed to see such senseless destruction of school property, particularly at the start of a new year".

Ethiopia - Apostolic Prefect inaugurates neuro-psychiatric clinic: In the footsteps of Mother Teresa of Calcutta

(7-2-23) "Among the precarious conditions in which we live here in Ethiopia," continues Father Antolini, "the area of mental and neurological diseases is the least covered and not yet significantly developed.

The world of mental illness is so delicate and with still so many taboos that almost frightens us, yet medical science is making impressive progress in healing or at least alleviating the suffering of our brothers and sisters with mental illness," said the Apostolic Prefect of Robe, Father Angelo Antolini, at the inauguration of the "Araara" Neuropsychiatric Centre in Bale last Sunday, February 5th.

In Bale, it was first Mother Teresa of Calcutta who personally reached out to people with mental health problems who were completely abandoned. In Goba, a few kilometers from Robe, there is still the Sisters of the Missionaries of Charity center, which treats hundreds of patients with psychiatric and neurological problems of varying degrees of severity.

China - New priests for Chinese dioceses, called to serve the Lord's Church "with humility and courage"

(7-2-23) On the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, in several dioceses in mainland China, new "workers in the Lord's Vineyard" were ordained and presented to the communities to which they will be called to exercise their priestly ministry.

On Thursday, February 2, five new priests were ordained in the Diocese of Yongnian (now Handan), Hebei Province. More than 130 priests concelebrated the ordination liturgy, presided over by Bishop Joseph Sun Jigen. The mass was attended by hundreds of seminarians, nuns and lay people.

Also on February 2, Bishop Joseph Huang Bingzhang of the Diocese of Shantou consecrated new

priest Chen Jiaying. Due to the measures still in place to combat the pandemic, only 400 priests, seminarians, nuns and lay people were able to attend the ordination liturgy.

Turkey - Antioch, the earthquake destroys mosques and churches. Catholic parish welcomes displaced people

(7-2-23) "The situation in Antioch is dramatic. Entire buildings have collapsed, mosques and churches have been destroyed. There are dead, there are people buried under the rubble, and in many places no one has yet arrived to try to save them. It is freezing cold, there is no light, there is no water, bread ovens have been destroyed, shops are closed. The streets, filled with debris, are impassable even for rescue vehicles," says Father Domenico Bertogli, 86, a Capuchin Friar.

Philippines - In Mindanao the celebration of the Week for Interreligious Harmony: dialogue and good works, even in the face of the earthquake

(7-2-23) We celebrated with joy in Zamboanga and throughout the island of Mindanao the World Week of Interreligious Harmony, which is celebrated every year from 1 to 7 February. It was the United Nations General Assembly that wanted a worldwide celebration of interreligious harmony and every year here, in the southern Philippines, we try to give it the right emphasis. This year, the event of the earthquake on February 1st did not discourage us, but was an opportunity to experience fraternity concretely", says to Fides Fr. Sebastiano D'Ambra, missionary of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME), initiator of the movement for Islamic-Christian dialogue "Silsilah" in the city of Zamboanga, on the island of Mindanao, in an area where there is a large Islamic community of about 6 million souls.

Chile - Christian community in solidarity with victims of forest fires that have so far caused 26 deaths, 1,000 injured, 1,800 homeless

(7-2-23) "Dozens of people have died, hundreds injured, incalculable material losses, life's work turned to ashes, many dreams shattered and hundreds of thousands of jobs lost": this is the partial result of the fires that have affected the population in southern Chile, in the words of Archbishop Fernando Chomali of Concepcion, Vice President of the Chilean Bishops' Conference, published by the newspaper La Estrella de Concepción.

According to experts, many of these fires is thought to be arson, caused by the hand of man. "We all hope that they will be identified and judged accordingly," says Archbishop Chomali. He calls on Chilean society and the government to prepare themselves to face the summer, and above all it is necessary to organize themselves in another way "to prevent unscrupulous people from doing so much damage."

According to Chile's National Disaster Prevention and Response Service (Senapred), the wave of forest fires that has hit south-central Chile since last week has left at least 26 people dead and more than 1,000 injured. A provisional toll reports more than 800 homes destroyed by the flames, with at least 1,800 homeless people housed in emergency shelters.

Indian court rules virginity test on nun 'unconstitutional'

(7-2-23) A top court in India has declared the virginity test performed on a Catholic nun 15 years ago in the course of a murder probe as "unconstitutional" and ordered police and other investigative agencies to desist from such a practice.

"The virginity test conducted on a female detainee, accused under investigation, or in custody, whether judicial or police, is declared unconstitutional and in violation of Article 21 of the Constitution which includes the right to dignity," Justice Swarana Kanti Sharma of the Delhi High Court in national capital New Delhi said in an order on Feb. 7. The order said the test "is sexist and is in violation of the human right to dignity" of a female accused, even if it is conducted "while being in custody."

Sister Sephy, a member of the St Joseph's Congregation had moved the high court some 13 years ago to challenge the virginity test conducted on her as part of investigations into the 1992 murder of

Sister Abhaya, a junior nun from her congregation. Both the nuns belong to the Kottayam archdiocese of the Eastern rite Syro-Malabar Church in southern Kerala.

Sister Sephy along with Kottayam archdiocesan Father Thomas Kottoor was held guilty by a special Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) court and sentenced to life in jail on Dec. 23, 2020.

Sri Lanka bankrupt to last until 2026, president says

(7-2-23) Sri Lanka's president said on 8 Feb, the island nation will remain bankrupt for at least three more years as he works to repair battered government finances following an unprecedented economic crisis.

Ranil Wickremesinghe took office last year at the peak of national unrest sparked by months of food, fuel and medicine shortages. He has since pushed through tax hikes and negotiated with international creditors after a default on Sri Lanka's foreign debt to clear the way for a sorely needed IMF bailout. But on 8 Feb. Wednesday he said the economy would return to growth by the end of 2023 as new revenue measures boosted government coffers.

8-2-23

At audience, Pope reviews trip to Africa

(8-2-23) At his regular weekly public audience on February 8, Pope Francis gave a report on his voyage to Africa, where "I said 'No' to violence, 'No' to resignation, 'Yes' to reconciliation and hope. The Pope said that he had long wanted to visit "the green heart of Africa," of which he said, "together with Amazonia, they are the two lungs of the world."

He decried the exploitation of Africa's rich natural resources, and the warfare that has bloodied the two countries that he visited: the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan. The latter, he said, is "a victim of the old logic of power and rivalry."

The Pontiff said that on his "ecumenical pilgrimage of peace" to South Sudan had continued an effort to foster dialogue in that country. He also condemned the corruption that mars African politics, and the arms trafficking that exploits violence.

German leaders make pitch for 'synodal way' at Europe's synod meeting

(8-2-23) 200 delegates have gathered for the European continental stage of the Synod on synodality. A Polish delegate to the gathering warned against the "temptation to build some other church."

EU bishops call for release of detained priests in Nicaragua

(8-2-23) The legal system in Nicaragua has jailed four priests and sentenced them to ten years in prison, as part of its comprehensive ongoing crackdown against dissent, while Bishop Rolando Alvarez of Matagalpa continues to be held under house arrest.

In a letter, Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, President of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) expressed solidarity to the Catholic Church in Nicaragua and appealed for the release of the detainees. The sentence was announced on Monday after a closed-doors trial. The convicted priests had worked with Bishop Alvarez who has been held under house arrest since August 2022.

Cardinal Hollerich called on the Nicaraguan national authorities to immediately release Bishop Rolando Álvarez and the other detainees, falsely accused of conspiracy against national integrity and of disseminating fake news.

Papal condemnation of human trafficking

(8-2-23) "Human trafficking disfigures dignity," Pope Francis said, in a video message for the 9th World Day of Prayer and Reflection against Human Trafficking.

Pope leads prayers for earthquake victims in Turkey, Syria

(8-2-23) At the conclusion of his public audience on February 8, Pope Francis asked the faithful to join in prayer for “the peoples of Turkey and Syria who have been hard hit by the earthquake, which has caused thousands of deaths and injuries.”

The Pope also thanked relief workers who are racing to help the afflicted—noting that some, in Syria, have already suffered for years of continued warfare.

Lift sanctions against Syria to allow for earthquake aid, Middle East’s Christian leaders urge

(8-2-23) “We urge the immediate lifting of sanctions on Syria and allowing access to all materials, so sanctions may not turn into a crime against humanity,” the Middle East Council of Churches said following the powerful Turkey–Syria earthquake.

Africa is ‘rapidly becoming the centre of gravity of global Catholicism’, highest number of martyrs

(8-2-23) “In the past decade, Africa has overtaken Europe as the largest source of priestly ordinations in the world,” the report notes. Nigeria had 410 priestly ordinations in 2019—behind only India and the US, each with 415 ordinations.

Meanwhile, the Catholic Pontifical and charity foundation, Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) International, has paid tribute to Christians all over the world who were killed because of their faith, noting that most martyrs of 2022 came from Africa.

“Africa is the continent which has the largest number of martyrs, with four priests killed in Nigeria alone, two in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), as well as one nun,” ACN says in the February 3 report. The foundation adds, “The American continent follow closely behind in this sad ranking, with notably three priests and one seminarian murdered in Mexico.”



Statue of Mary Untouched in Earthquake that Demolished Cathedral in Turkey

(8-2-23) A statue of the Virgin Mary was untouched after the collapse of a Catholic cathedral in an earthquake that struck Turkey and Syria on Monday, 6 February, inflicting heavy damage with a death toll already exceeding 7,000 and leaving thousands more injured.

The image of Our Lady was unharmed in the quake that brought

down Annunciation Cathedral in the city of Alexandretta in the Turkish province of Hatay. The cathedral was the main church of the Apostolic Vicariate of Anatolia.

The number of victims in Turkey and Syria continues to rise as the rubble is removed.

This story was first published by ACI Prensa, CNA’s Spanish-language news partner. It has been translated and adapted by CNA.

Pakistani Christians brace for more persecution under revised blasphemy law

(8-2-23) A recent move to make Pakistan’s so-called blasphemy laws stricter will make it easier to convict innocent people, including religious minorities, says a British Pakistani Christian organization.

“The additional hardening of laws will make it only easier to convict innocent people,” said Juliet Chowdhry, Trustee for the British Asian Christian Association.

The organization says that Christians suffer “severe persecution” in Pakistan, and any tightening of blasphemy laws are likely to impact them.

The laws already provide the death penalty for anyone who offends Islam. Now, Pakistan’s National Assembly raised the minimum prison sentence to 10 years for anyone who insults the wives, companions, and family members of the Prophet Mohammed. Formerly, the maximum was three years. The amendment to article 298 of the penal code also provides for a 1 million rupee fine – about \$4,500.

China - Chinese Catholic newspaper Xinde calls for prayer and donations for earthquake victims

(8-2-23) A strong appeal for prayer and solidarity in favour of the Turkish and Syrian populations affected by the disastrous earthquake was launched immediately after the first tremendous shock on Tuesday, February 7 by the weekly online version of Xinde, the most widely circulated Catholic bulletin in Chinese. The website reports with news and current photos from those devastated by the earthquake areas and publishes the message of Pope Francis to the two apostolic nuncios in Syria and Turkey. The Chinese Catholic communities are invited to gather to pray the Rosary for their Turkish and Syrian brothers and sisters, and to organize collections of goods and aid to be sent to the areas affected by the earthquake.

Philippines - The Somascan Fathers in celebration and on mission for orphaned and abandoned children

(8-2-23) Father Melchor Umandal, the Provincial of the Somascan Province in Southeast Asia, recounts the missionary activities in the province, primarily in the field of education with three schools (Aemilianum College in Sorsogon, St. Jerome Emiliani School of Dinalupihan in Bataan, and St. Jerome School of Sta. Rosa in Laguna) all recognized by the government. Then there are the reception centers for orphans and children: there are 7 "Miani Homes" in the province, 6 in the Philippines and one in Indonesia, all accredited by the government's Social Services. Here they take care of the spiritual, educational, physical and health needs of children, especially orphans and abandoned street children.

Furthermore, the "Somasco lay Movement", is active, made up of groups of lay collaborators, teachers and volunteers, but also professionals such as doctors, nurses, dentists and psychologists who offer free services for the benefit of children.

The Somaschi mission in Southeast Asia has celebrated its 40th anniversary.

Syria - Monk (and next bishop) Jacques Mourad: the earthquake, the "full measure" of pain, and the mystery of our faith

(8-2-23) In the faces of so many people Father Jacques sees expressions of surrender and total depression. And then, in a helplessness that finds in itself no strength to react, courage shines back, gratuitous relief to those most hurt. "The tremors, yesterday, could still be felt. It is cold, there is humidity, so many are already sick, so many will get sick. But people are living and helping each other in churches, in mosques, on the road, in cars". ("The only thing missing was this earthquake to fill to the brim the cup of suffering. And now, in this very situation, hope, charity, solidarity among all still passes, thanks be to God. Today the mystery of our faith passes along these ruins". Father Jacques Mourad, the Syrian monk from Deir Mar Musa monastery, will be ordained Archbishop of Homs of the Syrian Catholics in early March. But on Tuesday, February 7, he was in the devastated streets of Aleppo. His testimony, collected by Fides, recounts the new wounds opened by the earthquake in the martyred city, which is also his hometown. And at the same time, without adding unnecessary words, he also recounts his faith.

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Brazil - The work of the Church to combat human trafficking must be integrated by a government program

"An important role of this Commission is listening. We hear the cry of anguish of our sisters and brothers who experience various forms of violence. We have heard the cry of hunger, the absence of public policies, we have heard many cries. Listening is something to which Pope Francis has drawn our attention. At this moment in which there is a sign of hope, we must be more attentive to listening". With these words the Bishop of Pesqueira, Monsignor José Luiz Ferreira Salles, summarizes the meeting of the Special Episcopal Commission for the fight against human trafficking (CEPEETH) of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB) which took place in Brasilia recently. The Commission members traveled to the Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship, where they were received by the Chief of Cabinet of the Executive Secretariat, Laura Zacher, and by Rita Cristina de Oliveira, Executive Secretary of the Ministry. In a letter, CEPEETH proposed the resumption of commitments to combat human trafficking in the country. Bishop Evaristo Pascoal Spengler the President of the Commission, assured the government that the Church will its programme of training courses to pastors, organizations and institutions that promote initiatives to combat human trafficking. Sister Eurides Alves de Oliveira underlined that "if all this effort and work of the Church and civil society is not accompanied or integrated into a government program with public policies and structures, the result is fragmentary."

Chinese Christians start prayer campaign amid state purge

(8-2-23) Members of a Protestant House Church in northern China, forcibly shut down last year, launched a prayer campaign for the well-being of detained pastors, leaders, and their family members amid a government crackdown, says a report.

Five prayer requests were sent to the members as the authorities in the Yadou district of Shanxi province have continued an investigation into the Linfen Covenant House Church, China Aid reported on Feb. 7. Linfen Church and a church-run school were shut down last November, citing unauthorized religious and educational activities, according to *Bitter Winter* magazine.

Last August, police arrested the church's preachers -- Li Jie and Han Xiaodong -- and placed them under house arrest. Later, following interrogations of church members, police arrested Wang Qiang, a leader and co-worker of the church. The three arrested were charged with "fraud" allegedly based on testimonies of church members that they "defrauded" congregants through tithings and offerings.

Indian woman lawyer sworn-in as judge amid protests



(8-1-23) A female senior advocate, accused of hate speech against Christians and Muslims, has been appointed an additional judge of a top court in an Indian province despite opposition from a section of lawyers. Lekshmana Chandra Victoria Gowri was sworn in as additional judge of the Madras High Court in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu on Feb. 7 even as the top court in the country was hearing a petition challenging the appointment.

The Supreme Court later dismissed the petition which challenged Gowri's appointment on grounds that she was once an office-bearer of

the women's wing of the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party, and on multiple occasions, had made statements against Christians and Muslims in the country. "I would like to say Christian groups are more dangerous than Islamic groups. Both are equally dangerous in the context of conversion, especially Love Jihad [a term used for Muslim men marrying girls from other religions to promote Islam]," she said in an interview.

Lawyers from Tamil Nadu on Feb. 1 wrote letters to President Droupadi Murmu and the Supreme Court collegium against her appointment.

"Now that she has taken oath as a judge, we expect she will work for upholding the constitution and its principles of secularism," said a Catholic lawyer, who did not want to be named.

HK pro-democracy advocates accused of subversion, conspiracy

(8-2-23) Hong Kong's prosecutors accused 47 pro-democracy activists including former lawmakers of subversion by plotting to use their majority in the city's legislature as a "lethal constitutional weapon" against the government.

The largest trial against the democracy advocates - politicians, activists, campaigners, and community workers – under the national security law started on Feb. 6.

Among the defendants 16 pleaded not guilty to the charge of conspiracy to commit subversion, whereas 31 pleaded guilty, *the Hong Kong Free Press* (HKFP) reported on Feb. 6.

9-2-23

Nicaragua releases political prisoners, flies them to US

(9-2-23) The government of Nicaragua has released 222 political prisoners, declaring them traitors to the country and sending them to the United States.

The group released on February 9 includes former presidential candidates and leaders of the opposition to President Daniel Ortega's authoritarian regime, including some who have been jailed for nearly two years.

The US Department of State, which arranged for the reception of the Nicaraguan exiles, welcomed the prisoners' release. Although the names of those released have not yet been released, the group reportedly includes the six Catholic priests and seminarians who were sentenced last week to 10-year terms. It apparently does not include Bishop Rolando Alvarez of Matagalpa, who is in prison awaiting trial on political charges.

Syrian Church leaders: drop economic sanctions after earthquake



(9-2-23) In the wake of the earthquake that has devastated their country, the Christian leaders of Syria have pleaded for an end to economic sanctions on the country.

In a message to the UN, Church leaders said that the sanctions imposed by the West in 2021 have caused hardships for the Syrian people, who are already suffering from the effects of war, and now the damage done by the earthquake. The sanctions have not had the desired influence on the government of President Bashar al Asad.

The Church leaders "call upon people of conscience around the world to raise their voices to demand an end to the suffering of the Syrian people," the message says, insisting that a continuation of the sanction is "unjust." The message is signed by the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius Ephrem II, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Yohanna X, and the Melkite Catholic Patriarch Youssef I Absi, along with other leaders of Christian communities in Syria.

Church of England approves same-sex unions

(9-2-23) The Church of England will give formal blessings to same sex-unions.

A proposal to recognize homosexual couples was passed by the synod of the Church of England, with bishops giving it overwhelming support, while clergy and laity approved by closer margins.

Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury welcomed the decision. "For the first time, the Church of England will publicly, unreservedly, and joyfully welcome same-sex couples in church," he said. But he acknowledged that "deep differences on these questions" remain in the Anglican communion.

Cardinal sees hope for amnesty for Cuban political prisoners

(9-2-23) Cardinal Benjamin Stella said that proposed amnesty for prisoners who were jailed after the pro-democracy protests in 2021 is "on the table" in his talks with Cuban government leaders.

The former prefect of the Congregation for Clergy, who is in Cuba as a special papal envoy, said that he is waiting for the government's response to the proposal.

Pope tells doctors not to be discouraged by disease

(9-2-23) At a February 9 meeting with Italian physicians, Pope Francis said that doctors should see the face of Jesus in their patients, and so recognize that they serve the suffering Christ. The Pope said that “we must learn to see, in our brother’s pain, a ‘signal of precedence,’ which deep in our hearts forces us to stop and does not allow us to go any further.”

Priest kidnapped in Haiti; captors demand ransom

(9-2-23) The Claretian Missionaries’ Independent Delegation for the Antilles reported that on Feb. 7 one of its priests was kidnapped.

Father Antoine Macaire Christian Noah was abducted in the morning when he was going to his missionary community in Kazal, about 20 miles north of Port-au-Prince, the country’s capital. The kidnappers have contacted “the superior of his missionary community asking for money in exchange for his release,” according to a statement from the Claretians posted on Facebook.

Macaire is originally from Cameroon and has been the parochial vicar at St. Michael the Archangel Parish in Kazal for one year.

Haiti has been without a president since July 2021, when President Jovenel Moïse was assassinated. Since then, no new elections have been held. The struggle for power has ramped up violence. The August 2021 earthquake only further aggravated the plight of Haitians.

(10-2-23) "Among the latest incidents reported by our Camillian confreres in Haiti, a violent attack took place against an institute of Brazilian nuns present in Port au Prince. The bandits took everything away and used violence against the nuns," says Father Antonio Menegòn.



Moscow’s Catholic archbishop weighs in on war, synod

(9-2-23) In an interview with the *National Catholic Register*, Archbishop Paolo Pezzi of Moscow said “we have not seen fit, as bishops, to make our own statement in support or against” the war in Ukraine. “We made a proposal of prayer and fasting to foster forgiveness and peace in the face of the ongoing tragedy.”

Archbishop Pezzi, who is taking part in the continental stage of the Synod on synodality, said “we should try not to detach ourselves too much from the teachings of the Church on the basis of our own opinions.”

Fulani herdsmen kill Christian, leaving wife shattered

(9-2-23) A Christian Nigerian woman discussed the murder of her husband by Fulani herdsmen. The Fulani are predominantly Muslim. “Despite her pregnancy, the Fulani herdsmen attacked her, too,” according to Aid to the Church in Need. “A machete struck her shoulder, back, and head, and she lost three fingers.”

Fiji prelate lauds prime minister’s leadership, despite past coups

(9-2-23) Archbishop Peter Loy Chong of Suva (Fiji), the president of the Federation of Catholic Bishops’ Conferences of Oceania, lauded Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka’s “leadership trend as inspiring” and said “it is the type of leadership the Church is encouraging,” according to a local media report.

Rabuka has had a checkered career that includes involvement in military coups.

“Rabuka cuts a very different figure today than he did 36 years ago, when he led the first of Fiji’s four coup d’etats,” a Georgetown University professor recently wrote. “Rabuka has repeatedly apologized for his role in the 1987 coups and now styles himself as a man of the people guided by his devout, but now far more tolerant, Christian faith.”

DR Congo - The toll of the assault on a UN convoy worsens

(9-2-23) Tensions remain high in North Kivu province in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. This morning, February 9, new clashes are reported between the Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC) and M23 rebels along the Kitshanga - Sake road about 10 km from the latter. The fighting has created general panic in the town of Sake, from where a number of people are heading towards Goma and Minova, further increasing the number of displaced people welcomed in and around the capital of North Kivu.

Meanwhile, the toll of the assault on the United Nations Mission for the Stabilization of the Congo (MONUSCO) convoy on February 7 worsens- resulting in 8 deaths and 28 wounded.



Tanzania - Celebrating the God of the Mission: centenary of the presence of the Consolata Missionaries

(9-2-23) Commenting on the centenary of the presence of the Consolata Missionaries in Iringa, Sister Simona Brambilla, Superior General of the Order, and Sister Maria Michela Astegiano, say: "In this centenary we celebrate not ourselves, Consolata Missionaries, but Him, the Source of the Mission".

During the Eucharistic celebration of thanksgiving, held on January 30, 2023 in the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Iringa, Blessed Irene Stefani and Blessed Leonella Sgorbati, who gave

their lives in Africa, among others, were remembered.

The Founder of the Consolata Order, Blessed Giuseppe Allamano, founded the Institute in Turin in 1910. On December 8, 1922, the first Consolata Missionary Sisters, MC, departed from Turin bound for Tanganyika, which, on April 26, 1964, joined Zanzibar and together formed the United Republic of Tanzania. They were joined on the ship in Mombasa by two sisters from the Vicariate of Kenya. Arriving in Dar es Salaam on January 10, 1923, five days later the sisters continued by rail to Dodoma. After four hours of walking, they reached Bihawana from where, on January 22, together with some Consolata Missionary Fathers, they began the caravan that took them, after 300 km on foot, to Tosamaganga, where they arrived on January 30.

Turkey - Bishop Bizzeti: dramatic situation. The earthquake forces to abandon the politics of conflict

(9-2-23) In the face of the earthquake that has annihilated thousands of human lives and reduced entire neighborhoods between Syria and Turkey to rubble, the collective tragedy and common pain of different nations and peoples "makes it even more evident, if it weren't already quite clear, that only by moving together in the same direction can we do something useful. A tragedy like this, if it were looked at with lucidity and realism, could become a paradoxical incentive for peace". With this vision and judgment, Bishop Paolo Bizzeti, Apostolic Vicar of Anatolia, analyzes the possible repercussions of the earthquake in the context of tensions, violence, armed incursions, sectarianism and geopolitical voracity which are located precisely in the areas affected by the last catastrophe in the Middle East. In the complicated panorama full of unknowns - Bishop Bizzeti points out - "the people affected by the earthquake now only need help, wherever it comes from. The tragic circumstance we are experiencing, if we look well at things as they are, should be an opportunity for us all to recognize that it is better to tear down walls and fences, political divisions that basically do not do well for the population. The earthquake is also an opportunity to rethink our lives together, our policies, orienting them towards peace".

the Apostolic Vicar of Anatolia also reports: "The charity networks linked in various ways to the Catholic Church - starting with Caritas - have all been activated to help the affected populations, and there is close collaboration with state bodies. But the affected area is very vast, and it was not possible to intervene promptly on all fronts".

Latin America - Appeal to young people: "Our time has come! Our commitment is the transformation of society and the construction of the civilization of love"

(9-2-23) "We want to express our feeling of closeness to the young people of Peru, Haiti, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Mexico and other countries of the continent; to those who have been suffering the ravages of socio-political conflicts in their countries, with disastrous consequences for their lives": say the members of the Latin American and Caribbean Youth Ministry Team, in a video message addressed to the young people of the continent, after the meeting held at CELAM at the end of January and a series of meetings with various protagonists of society and the Church on the continent.



"We want to ensure our closeness to young people who are part of the marginalized minorities in our countries", that is to say, to young people who have been violated, to migrants, to those who experience sexual diversity, to indigenous peoples: all realities that afflict us and invite us to "get out of ourselves".

Crusading Indonesian priest is accused of defamation

(9-2-23) An Indonesian government official has filed a police complaint against a Catholic priest, accusing him of spreading fake news that links the official with the smuggling of migrant workers. Father Chrisanctus Paschalis Saturnus, head of the Migrant and Overseas Pastoral Peace Justice Commission of Pangkalpinang diocese told UCA News on Feb. 9 he was aware of the complaint filed by Bambang Panji Prianggodo, deputy head of the State Intelligence Agency in Riau Island Province. The priest spread fake news "through a letter, which was distributed to various agencies until finally, our client received information about the letter," the official's lawyer Ade Darmawan told reporters on Feb. 8.

Father Saturnus, an activist who works for the rights of migrant workers, sent a letter to advocacy organizations for the rights of migrant workers, including those in the capital Jakarta, informing them of the smuggling of workers through ports and transport hubs close to the borders of Malaysia and Singapore, a Church source told UCA News on condition of anonymity.

Riau Islands Province, where Prianggodo is based, borders Singapore and Malaysia, the reported hotbed destinations of illegal migrants from Indonesia.

The priest's letter "alleged the involvement of a number of parties, including government officials. One of them was the deputy head of the intelligence service, who is suspected of backing" the smuggling activities, the source said.

The letter was leaked and "it was used as evidence by the complainant," the source added.

Prianggodo's lawyer said they filed the police complaint after their subpoena was not responded to. However, he declined to disclose details of the complaint or the nature of the accusations against the priest.

Father Saturnus told UCA News on Feb. 9 that although he was "aware of the complaint" he had chosen not to respond. He wanted the media to contact his lawyer "to avoid any misunderstandings."

Korean Church apologizes to Vietnam for war massacres

(9-2-23) A visiting South Korean Catholic bishop has apologized to the people of Vietnam for atrocities committed by his country's soldiers during the US-led Vietnam War.

Bishop Peter Lee Ki-Heon of Uijeongbu and 12 priests were on a friendship visit to Lang Son Cao Bang Diocese in northern Vietnam. They also visited some religious sites in Vietnam.

"On behalf of the Catholic Church in South Korea, I apologize to the Church in Vietnam," said the bishop, who led the Military Ordinariate during 1999-2010.

This was the first time a Korean bishop apologized to Vietnamese people for atrocities committed by Korean troops half a century ago.

Myanmar Christians fear martial law spells more attacks

(9-2-23) Christians and human rights groups fear that martial law recently imposed by the Myanmar army junta in dozens of townships across the country will trigger more attacks on Christian-dominated areas.

The army-controlled State Administration Council imposed martial law on 37 townships in the regions of Sagaing, Magway, Bago and Tanithargyi and in Chin, Kayah, Karen and Mon states, on Feb. 2 after extending a state of emergency for six more months in the civil-war-hit country.

Military commanders have imposed a 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew and banned gatherings of more than five people in the 37 townships.

One clergyman from the Sagaing region near Mandalay, who did not wish to be named due to fears for his safety, told UCA News on Feb. 8 that the expansion of martial law could pave the way for more attacks on Christian-majority villages under the pretext of implementing the order.



Demolition threatens 400-year-old chapel in India

(9-2-23) A four-century-old chapel in western India dating back to the Portuguese colonial era faces a threat of demolition as the administration aims to acquire land to turn it into a football stadium, sparking concerns among local Catholics.

Catholic community leaders say the chapel of Our Lady Of Remedies faces threat due to a controversial beautification drive planned by Praful Patel, the administrator and a leader of the pro-Hindu Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). Daman and Diu is a federally ruled territory that comes directly under the

administrative control of the BJP-led government in New Delhi Territory's administrator Patel neither confirmed nor denied the move to demolish the chapel to expand the football field.

Rui Pereira, a local Catholic leader, along with a group of Catholic leaders recently met Daman Municipal Council president Sonal Patel to express their concerns.

Indian yoga guru is kicking up a storm ahead of polls

(9-2-23) The state of Rajasthan's police registered a case against India's Yoga guru-turned-business tycoon Baba Ramdev for promoting enmity and outraging religious feelings by insulting religion.

Ramdev, who is perhaps one of the richest "godmen" in India, joins a long list of hate mongers and votaries of *Hindutva* who advocate Hindu supremacy and seek to transform India into a Hindu nation, a project incubated a century ago at the Nagpur headquarters of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Hindu nationalist paramilitary volunteer organization. Ramdev's speech in Barmer, Rajasthan, on Feb.2 prompted a section of Muslim clergy to issue a call to boycott products of Patanjali Ayurved, the godman's business venture which clocked a turnover of US\$4.02 billion last fiscal.

Ramdev is also likely to face the music for his utterances in Persian Gulf countries, where Patanjali products are in high demand thanks to the Indian diaspora. In Barmer, Ramdev, as seen in a video, accused Muslims and Christians of being "obsessed with conversion."

10-2-23

'Training, discipline, and motivation': papal address to athletes

(10-2-23) On February 9, Pope Francis received members of the Vatican Amateur Sports Association on the 50th anniversary of its founding.

European Catholics debate final outcome of Synod on Synodality assembly in Prague

(10-2-23) "Due to time constraints, delegates were not able to read and reflect on the final document before entering into the debate," according to the report. Women's ordination, homosexuality, and poverty were among the issues discussed.

English priest arrested for free speech protest outside abortion clinic

(10-2-23) Police in Birmingham arrested Father Sean Gough, who was holding a sign with the words "praying for free speech" outside an abortion clinic. He was later charged with "intimidating service users."

"At all times, I believed my actions to be lawful – freedom of expression, especially when peaceful, is protected in domestic and international law," he said. "It is deeply undemocratic to censor public streets, particularly those spaces where we know that many women have benefitted from peaceful offers of help about services available."

Change lifestyles to protect Mother Earth, Pope urges

(10-2-23) Speaking on February 10 to the Indigenous Peoples' Forum, Pope Francis said that "it is essential to make profound changes in our lifestyles" for the sake of the planet.

At a time of "an unprecedented social and environmental crisis," the Pope said, modern society should learn from indigenous peoples how to care for "Mother Earth."

Satanic group plans abortion clinic in New Mexico

(10-2-23) The Catholic bishops of New Mexico have voiced their horror at the news that a group called The Satanic Temple plans to open an abortion clinic in the state, introducing its own ritual for abortion.

Catholic activists want Nigerians to vote for candidates opposed to Christian persecution

(10-2-23) The 2023 Nigerian presidential election takes place on February 25. The nation of 225.1 million, the most populous in Africa and 6th most populous in the world, is 47% Muslim, 46% Christian (11% Catholic), and 7% ethnic religionist.

DR Congo - North Kivu: Missionary warns of conflicting reports and media campaigns

(10-2-23) "As far as we know, the rebels are still advancing towards Goma. The M23 militias are currently 35 km from the capital of North Kivu," says Pierre Kabeza, a former trade unionist now representing the rights of Congolese children and former president of the youth associations of the South Kivu region in the east of the country, to Fides.

Meanwhile, the Congolese army had announced that they had rejected the M23 guerrilla offensive on the town of Sake (see Fides, 9/2/2023). According to journalistic sources, they accompanied the Congolese military to Sake, where calm was reportedly restored after part of the population fled when the rebel advance was announced. "Yesterday (February 9) I received videos of civilians fleeing Sake, mostly women and children," confirms Pierre Kabeza.

China - Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, the Beijing parish of Xi Tang asks Mary for graces and healings on the World Day of the Sick

(10-2-23) The Beijing parish of Xi Tang celebrates the 300th anniversary of its foundation by inviting the people of God to make a spiritual "pilgrimage" tomorrow, February 11, on the day the liturgy celebrates the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes.

On the occasion of the feast, the Catholics of Beijing are invited to go in person to the Xi Tang Church, where they will be able to retrace the history of the apparitions, meditate on the 18 messages entrusted by the Immaculate Virgin to Bernadette Subirous from

露德圣母
朝圣活动安排

2023年2月11日
17:30-19:30
快来西堂
体验露德朝圣之旅

1. 露德圣母18次显现的信息
2. 露德圣水
3. 触摸露德圣石
4. 玫瑰经祈祷分享
5. 露德圣母游行
6. 圣体降福
7. 全大赦
8. 志愿服务分享

February 11 to July 16, 1858, receive holy water from Lourdes, touch a stone from the French Shrine, go in procession to the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes to pray the Rosary, participate in Eucharistic Adoration and obtain plenary indulgence.

On Saturday, February 11, the Church also celebrates the XXXI World Day of the Sick. The Catholic communities of China, which in recent months have shared the tragic evolution of the latest outbreak of the pandemic, also read in the light of this experience, the considerations and reminders offered by Pope Francis in his message for the Day of the Sick, titled "Take care of him". Compassion as a synodal exercise of healing".

Costa Rica - Bishops on the current situation: "We must not get used to violence"

(10-2-23) "Yes to justice, to love, to peace", said Pope John Paul II during his visit to Costa Rica on March 3, 1983. It is under this motto that the members of the Costa Rican Bishops' Conference present their final message Plenary Assembly just days before the 40th anniversary of the visit of John Paul II, believing that the Pope's words "should find an echo in the current context in which we live".

Crime was among the issues discussed by the bishops at the February 6-9 meeting. In this regard, the bishops recalled that the number of homicides in Costa Rica has increased in recent years, reaching an all-time high in 2022 at a rate of 12.6 per 100,000 inhabitants. They urge all the country's authorities "to put an end to this tragedy, and to start "a serious and concrete dialogue" that will make it possible to find common solutions to combat this problem. "We cannot and must not get used to violence".

Indian states asked to report on Christian persecution

(10-2-23) India's top court has directed seven state governments to present details of the action taken by their law enforcement agencies in cases of alleged attacks against Christians and their institutions.

A Supreme Court bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud on Feb. 6 ordered the state of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh to present the information within three weeks.

The order came while hearing a public interest petition (PIL) filed by Archbishop Peter Machado of Bangalore along with the National Solidarity Forum and the Evangelical Fellowship of India. The Supreme Court at an earlier hearing on Sept. 1 last year had directed the federal home ministry to obtain reports from eight states to enable it to assess the claims of the Christian petitioners on the alleged violent incidents against their community members and institutions. The eight states were to provide information on the incidents of "criminal wrongdoings" that occurred in 2021, as alleged in the petitions, verifying the registration of cases by police on receiving information about the crime, the status of investigations, the arrests made, and charges filed in court for prosecuting the culprits. The Supreme Court said the verification exercise was needed to determine whether directions issued by it in a number of earlier judgments were being followed by the provincial authorities. The judgments made the states accountable for preventing violence and taking action against perpetrators of sectarian violence, especially the lynchings of minorities.

But the judges were told by the federal ministry that no states except one had submitted their verification reports. The court earlier said it intended to confirm the "veracity of the allegations" in the petitions and also directed the petitioners to share the details of each of the alleged incidents mentioned by them. The federal home ministry in its affidavit alleged that a majority of the incidents described as evidence of Christian persecution were either false or wrongfully projected.

11-2-23

Nicaraguan bishop sentenced to 26 years in prison





(11-2-23) Bishop Rolando Alvarez Lagos of Matagalpa, Nicaragua, has been sentenced to serve 26 years in prison for his public criticism of the Ortega regime.

The sentencing of Bishop Alvarez was announced the day after the Nicaraguan government allowed 222 political prisoners to fly to exile in the United States. The bishop refused to board the plane, choosing to remain in Nicaragua with his people.

As part of his sentence, Bishop Alvarez was stripped of his Nicaraguan citizenship—perhaps in anticipation of his exile. Six clerics who had been arrested and charged with him were among the prisoners who were flown to the US. But the bishop refused to get into the plane.

The court's decision charged the bishop with "being the author of the crimes of undermining national security and sovereignty, spreading fake news through information technology, obstructing an official in the performance of his duties, aggravated disobedience or contempt of authority, all committed concurrently and to the detriment of society and the State of the Republic of Nicaragua."
12-2-23

Pope at Angelus: Faith is a love story with God

(12-2-23) How to be fulfilled in faith and reciprocate God's love was the message at the heart of the Pope's reflection on Sunday as he addressed believers gathered for the recitation of the Angelus. Reflecting on the Gospel of the day, Pope Francis said Jesus "makes us understand that religious rules are necessary, they are good, but they are only the beginning: to fulfil them, it is necessary to go beyond the letter and live their meaning."

Taking his cue from the Gospel of Matthew in which Jesus says, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfil" (*Mt* 5:17), he explained that *To fulfil* is a key word to understand Jesus and his message.

It is not enough to lead a life respecting the laws, he said, refraining from killing but one has to avoid hurting with words, not only to refrain from committing adultery but living a love "tainted by duplicity and falsehood," to take a solemn oath "if one then acts with hypocrisy. "This," he underscored, "is not fulfilment."

The Holy Father explained that "Making an offering to God reciprocates the gratuity of his gifts." The message is clear, he said: "God loves us first, freely, taking the first step towards us, without us deserving it." "*We cannot celebrate His love without in our turn taking the first step towards reconciliation with those who have hurt us.*" The Pope continued, "otherwise external, purely ritualistic observance is pointless." He said that "it is necessary to go beyond the letter of the law and live their meaning."

Pope Francis said that this is a timeless issue and reminded believers that faith is not "a formal observance, which is satisfied with the *bare minimum*, whereas Jesus invites us to aspire to the *maximum possible*." Pope Francis concluded encouraging Christians to ask themselves how they live their faith: "Am I content with not doing harm, of keeping the "façade" in good order, or do I try to grow in love for God and others?"

Pope prays for Bishop Alvarez sentenced to jail in Nicaragua,

Pope Francis decried the 26-year-imprisonment of Nicaraguan Bishop Rolando Alvarez and the expulsion of dissidents including priests and seminarians, and appealed to political leaders to open their hearts to truth and justice and engage in dialogue.

His appeal after the Angelus prayer followed news of the sentencing to imprisonment of the Bishop of Matagalpa and the expulsion of 222 people who were detained for political reasons.

Bishops around the world condemn unjust persecution of the Church in Nicaragua

Pope asks for prayers and solidarity for quake victims in Turkey and Syria, UN calls for relief

(12-2-23) Pope Francis renews his appeal for concrete help and prayers for all those affected by the devastating earthquakes that struck Turkey and Syria. He also prays for war-ravaged Ukraine, calling on responsible parties to have the courage to walk the path of peace.

More than 29,000 people have died in Syria and Turkey as a result of last Monday's earthquakes.

The UN says around 800,000 people in the region are in urgent need of hot meals. The relief effort across Turkey and Syria remains slow and is continually hampered by freezing conditions.

And there is need for medical assistance, food and shelter for the survivors.


