

CATHOLIC WORLD LAST WEEK

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27-3-23

German bishops' leader announces surprise resignation

(27-3-23) In a surprise move, the vice-president of the German bishops' conference has resigned, just weeks after saying that he planned to remain in office despite criticism of his handling of sex-abuse complaints.

The Vatican announced the resignation of Bishop Franz-Josef Bode of Osnabrück on March 25, the same day that Pope Francis released revised norms for the handling of abuse complaints. [See today's separate CWN news analysis.] In announcing his resignation, he said: "I misjudged cases, often acted hesitantly, made many wrong decisions, and failed to live up to my responsibility as a bishop."

Bishop Bode, who at 72 was three years away from normal retirement, has been a leading champion of the German bishops' Synodal Path. He had recently announced that the German bishops would move forward with the recommendations of the Synodal Path despite Vatican opposition.



Dioceses should share common programs, institutions, Pope tells bishops

(27-3-23) Pope Francis suggested the diocesan seminaries should merge into shared institutions "to be oriented toward unity," as he spoke on March 27 to seminarians from Calabria.

The Pontiff recommended that bishops "guide all human, spiritual, and theological energies in a single seminary." He also recommended that different dioceses "join forces and pool ideas" to make common approaches to pastoral problems such as the evangelization of young people, Christian initiation, and the development of popular piety.

Before addressing these suggestions to bishops, the Pope told the visiting seminarians that they must "beware of falling into the trap of careerism, which is a scourge."

In pastoral statement Nordic bishops reject gender ideology

(27-3-23) The Catholic bishops of the Nordic countries have issued a letter criticizing gender ideology and urging their people to become better acquainted with the Church's teaching on human sexuality. Recalling how, in the book of Genesis, God shows the rainbow to Noah as a sign of his covenant with mankind, the Nordic bishops say: "As disciples of Christ, who is God's Image, we cannot reduce the sign of the rainbow to less than the life-giving compact between the Creator and creation."

The letter—signed by the Catholic bishops of Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, and Sweden—was read at Mass in parishes throughout those countries this past Sunday. In it, the bishops proclaim: "The point of the Church's teaching is not to curtail love but to enable it."

In their letter the bishops state their opposition to unjust discrimination of any kind, but continue: "We declare dissent, however, when the movement puts forward a view of human nature that abstracts from the embodied integrity of personhood, as if physical gender were accidental. And we protest when such a view is imposed on children..."

Pope urges ethical approach to artificial intelligence

(27-3-23) Pope Francis spoke on both the promises and the perils of Artificial Intelligence (AI), as he met on March 27 with participants in the "Minerva Dialogues" organized by the Dicastery for Culture and Education.

"I am convinced that the development of artificial intelligence and machine learning has the potential to contribute in a positive way to the future of humanity; we cannot dismiss it," the Pope said. "At the same time, I am certain that this potential will be realized only if there is a constant and consistent

commitment on the part of those developing these technologies to act ethically and responsibly.” Expressing his gratitude for the Minerva Dialogues, which seek to find ethical approaches to AI, the Pope also said that a study of the field should give high priority to the need for both equality and respect for human dignity.

German Cardinal Rauber, veteran Vatican diplomat, dies at 88

(27-3-23) Cardinal Karl-Josef Rauber, a veteran Vatican diplomat, died on March 26 at the age of 88.

Born in Mainz, Germany, Cardinal Rauber was ordained to the priesthood in 1959. He served at diplomatic posts in Uganda, Switzerland, Hungary, and Belgium, as well as a term as president of the Pontifical Ecclesial Academy, which trains clerics for the Vatican diplomatic service. He retired in 2009, and was elevated to the College of Cardinals by Pope Francis in 2015.

With the death of Cardinal Rauber there are now 222 living members of the College of Cardinals, of whom 123 are eligible to vote in a papal conclave.

In his telegram of condolence following the death of the Cardinal Pope Francis praised the veteran Vatican diplomat for his “dedication for the unity of the people of God.” Cardinal Rauber was a “true shepherd of the Church” who shared Christ’s love “unreservedly and joyfully” with everyone, the Pontiff added. Pope Francis created Archbishop Rauber a cardinal in 2015.



Philippines - Displaced families and the urban poor: the solidarity commitment of Catholic communities

(27-3-23) About 300 displaced families have lost their homes because, in recent days, the Department of Public Works of MetroManila has started the demolition of illegally built housing structures in the city of Caloocan to make way for construction of a highway. Only 74 of them are eligible for financial aid and housing assistance from the National Housing Authority (NHA). For others, not eligible to receive such support, the city government has said they will receive some form of subsidy from the social welfare department. According to data from the municipality, in MetroManila, out of a total population of 13 million people, 5 million people (about 800,000 families) live in slums scattered across the territory.

Faced with the government's lack of response, several Catholic parishes and communities in Manila have set up a free canteen service in the city's schools, Catholic or not, allowing street children and young people to benefit from meal at least once a day.

The Archdiocese's "National Secretariat for Social Action-Justice and Peace" invites all the faithful and civil authorities to "listen to the cry of the poor slum dwellers in these alleys which also serve as kitchens, bathrooms, recreational spaces and playgrounds for children".

Hong Kong - Children's almsgiving, cleaning in homes for the elderly: concrete works of Lenten charity in the diocese of Hong Kong

(27-3-23) The fundraising committee of the Lenten Movement of the diocese of Hong Kong has proposed simple and concrete gestures to practice the annual works of charity.

Envelopes and boxes, which often replicate the shape of the Easter lamb, have been distributed by many parishes in Hong Kong to boys and girls who use them during the week to deposit small offerings to bring to church on Sunday. Boys and girls have been advised to "take advantage" of the Lenten period to reduce the time wasted each day playing video games and excessive smartphone use. In some parishes, lay groups have launched "Lenten Cleansing Day", offering free home cleaning services for elderly people in need. Dozens of volunteers went two by two to the homes of elderly and isolated people.



India - Resignation and appointment of bishop of Poona

(27-3-23) On March 25, 2023, the Holy Father accepted the resignation from the pastoral care of the diocese of Poona, India, presented by Bishop Thomas Dabre. The Holy Father has appointed Bishop John Rodrigues (b.1967), hitherto auxiliary of Bombay, as bishop of the same diocese.

Demand to scrap welfare benefits for India's tribal Christians

(27-3-23) A Hindu nationalist organization has asked the Indian government to end welfare benefits to indigenous people who have embraced Christianity and Islam, which they say are foreign-origin religions.

Binud Kumbang, working president of the Janajati Dharma Sanskriti Suraksha Mancha, an affiliate of the pro-Hindu Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh working among indigenous communities, told a gathering in northeastern Assam state, that "conversion of indigenous people to foreign religions has been a threat" to the faith and culture of indigenous people, who constitute 8.6 percent of India's 1.3 billion population. "The converted people completely give up their original tribal culture, customs, rituals, and traditions," he told the gathering in Guwahati city of Assam on March 26. Kumbang and his organization claim to be working to liberate indigenous communities "from the clutches of foreign religions."

In India, Christianity and Islam are considered foreign-origin religions, while Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism are said to be of indigenous origin.

Archbishop John Moolachira of Guwahati, where Kumbang held his rally, said such a demand is not in the interest of indigenous people. "A person changes his/her religion according to one's personal choice. Nobody forces anyone to convert and therefore, demanding to scrap social welfare benefits for someone based on his/her religious faith is unjust and against the provisions of the constitution that does not discriminate," Archbishop Moolachira told UCA News on March 27.

The government and other interested parties must make serious efforts to protect the tribal people's diminishing culture, traditions and language rather than blaming religious conversion for everything, the archbishop added.

"The demand to end reservation benefits seems to be part of an agenda to threaten indigenous people from adopting a religion of their choice," said a Church leader who did not want to be named.

Vietnam officials storm Mass in 'illegal chapel'

(27-3-23) Government officials in Vietnam's Central Highlands have sparked outrage by storming and breaking up a Mass because worshippers held the service in an 'illegal chapel'.

Father Francis Xavier Le Tien Tien, pastor of Dak Giac Parish in Kontum Diocese, was celebrating Mass on March 22 in a house attended by Catholics in Dak Nong commune in Kon Tum province in the Central Highlands, bordering Laos and Cambodia, when he was told to end the service.

"It is shameful the way the authorities blatantly disrupted the sanctity of Mass," Father Thaddeus Vo Xuan Son, head of Kontum Diocese's Communication Committee, said on March 25.

A video clip that went viral after the incident showed up to 10 officials insisting Tien end the service while some of them took videos and photos of him and the participants. They were seen shouting angrily. A man who identified himself as a vice-chairman of the People's Committee was seen asking Tien, "What are you doing here? Where are you from?" He told the priest to present himself at the People's Committee headquarters in Dak To district for an investigation.



Father Tien, who has been providing pastoral care to local people for years, and a few faithful pleaded with the officials to let them complete the Mass. But they refused, saying that the house was not a place of worship. They turned off the lights and a female official took away a copy of the Missal from the altar. A senior diocesan priest said local authorities in Dak To are not forthcoming in issuing permits for religious activities.

After the incident, Bishop Michael Hoang Duc Oanh of Kontum said "local Catholics have no choice but to erect chapels underground" as permits are difficult to come by.

Indian priest arrested, diocesan official cries foul

(27-3-23) A priest who served as a principal of a Catholic school in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh was arrested and sent to judicial custody in a surprise search that appears preconceived. Police claimed to have searched Father R. B. Dionysius' residence within the campus of St Mary's School at the Morena district headquarters and seized a few bottles of alcohol and condoms.

The search operation, conducted under the direction of Nivedita Sharma, a member of the state's Commission for Protection of Child Rights on March 25, smacks of foul play to trap the priest, said an official from the Gwalior diocese under whose jurisdiction the school falls.

"It seemed to be part of a conspiracy to defame the diocesan school that has been doing well for the past 25 years," the diocesan official who did not want to be named told UCA News on March 27.

Fr Dionysius was arrested and sent to judicial custody on charges including disturbing public peace, conspiracy, threatening to cause death or grievous hurt, and using criminal force against a public servant on duty, police said. If convicted of all charges he can be jailed for at least ten years.

The diocesan official said they had applied in a court for the priest's bail on March 27 and expressed hope that he will be released soon.

Meanwhile, Sharma told the local media that police had sealed the priest's residence, which was within the school campus where some 1,800 students are studying.

China frees pastor jailed for Sunday service

(27-3-23) Authorities in China's northwestern Ningxia Hui province have released Geng Zejun, 51, a pastor of a Protestant house church, the Church of the Rock, who spent more than a year in custody for allegedly conducting Sunday services for local Christians and after 'refusing to join state-run Three-Self Church', according to a human rights group. He had been jailed in Shizuishan city.

28-3-23



St. Peter's basilica offers quicker access for prayer

(28-3-23) The Vatican has announced the opening of a new entry into St. Peter's basilica, to make access easier for those who come to pray and receive the sacraments.

On March 27, the Fabric of St. Peter's—the office responsible for maintenance of the Vatican basilica—opened a separate passage for worshippers, enabling them to avoid the long lines of tourists. The new passage "allows pilgrims to reach the most significant places of the spiritual and liturgical life: the statue of

the Pietà, the Altar of St. John Paul II, the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament, the Gregorian Chapel with the image of Our Lady of Succour, the area reserved for penitents for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, until reaching the Altar of the Chair and the Chapel of St. Joseph for the celebration of Holy Mass."

Pope tells seminarians priests are to be pastors

(28-3-23) On March 27, Pope Francis received seminarians from the Italian province of Calabria, but devoted most of his reflections—some of them pointed—to the bishops of the province's 11 dioceses (and one eparchy).

Quoting Christ's question to the first disciples—"What do you seek?" (John 1:38)—the Pope asked the seminarians:

What do you seek in the priesthood? We must ask ourselves this, because sometimes it happens that "behind the appearance of piety and even love for the Church", in reality we seek "human glory and personal well-being" (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 93). It is very sad when you find priests who are officials, who have forgotten they are pastors of the people, and have turned into State clerics, like those of the French courts, Monsieur Abbé, they were State clerics. It is bad when you lose the priestly sense; perhaps we are looking for priestly ministry as a refuge behind which to hide ourselves, or a role for prestige, instead of wishing to be pastors with the same compassionate and merciful heart of Christ.

"Here, let us remember this: the Seminary is the time to be true with ourselves, setting aside the masks, the disguise, appearances," the Pope continued. "And in this process of discernment, let yourselves be worked upon by the Lord, who will make you pastors according to his heart, because masking, disguising, appearing is the opposite, it is proper to functionaries, not to shepherds of the people but of state clerics."

Prayers of Pope Francis headed for space broadcast

(28-3-23) A satellite will broadcast the prayers of Pope Francis into space in June.

A SpaceX Falcon rocket, launched from California, will carry a recording of the prayers that Pope Francis offered on March 27, 2020, in an empty St. Peter's Square, during the Covid lockdown. The recording will be broadcast from space for several months.

Kyrgyzstan police fine nun for giving reading during Mass

(28-3-23) Police in Kyrgyzstan entered a Catholic church during Mass on March 28, and levied a fine against Sister Daniela Cincilova for allegedly spreading the Catholic faith without legal authorization from the government's Commission for Religious Affairs.

A church spokesman said that Sister Cincilova was not acting as a religious minister, but was giving one of the readings for Sunday Mass when police entered.



Irish Catholic school transferred to government control

(28-3-23) A Catholic elementary school in Dublin has been turned over to secular authorities, as part of a campaign to remove schools from church control.

About 90% of Ireland's schools are administered by the Catholic Church, although the schools are subsidized by the government. In announcing that St. Enda's school will now be supervised by the City of Dublin, Archbishop Demot Farrell welcomed the change, which he said will "reflect the growing diversity of Irish society."

Rome billboards plead for preservation of traditional Latin Mass

(28-3-23) Dozens of billboards appeared around the city of Rome on March 28, pleading for the preservation of the traditional Latin liturgy.

The signs—in English as well as in Italian—were posted by a coalition of groups dedicated to the traditional liturgy. They explained in a press release that their cause was "for peace and unity in the Church."

Iraq - New electoral rules approved amid controversy, which also affect the distribution of seats reserved for Christian candidates

(28-3-23) The Iraqi Parliament has approved a series of controversial amendments to the electoral system, with changes that are causing heated political controversy and also affect how seats reserved for ethnic and religious minorities, including Christians, are allocated.

The new regulation, approved at dawn on Monday, March 27, provide for a return to an essentially proportional electoral system that is expected to favor large political formations and coalitions, at the expense of independent candidates and smaller political groups.



Kenya - Population exhausted: clashes against the government continue and drought does not stop

(28-3-23) The population is exhausted, the drought that has been going on for more than two years with serious repercussions on most Kenyans is compounded by anti-government protests organized by the opposition. The cost of living and the resignation of President William Ruto, considered by many not democratically elected during last year's vote are the focus of the riots.

According to information released by the BBC, 238 arrests had already been registered last week, including four MPs, one dead and 31 police officers injured.

Immediate action was taken by the country's bishops who called on politicians from the opposition-led Azimio la Umoja-one Kenya Coalition and those in the Kenya Kwanza government, as well as all Kenyans, to think together for the good and development of the nation.

"We will not return to that slippery path that leads to violence, we cannot allow our country to regress into disaster," the church leaders warned in their statement signed by Archbishop of Mombasa Martin Kivuva Musonde, president of the Kenya Bishops' Conference.

Vietnam - Apostolate and Pastoral Service in the Central Highlands of Vietnam: "Being and Making Community"

(28-3-23) The evangelizing mission and pastoral service are not easy in the mountainous regions of the central highlands of Vietnam, where a patient work of weaving between different indigenous realities and groups is needed, to "be and make community", in order to truly walk together. In this region of central Vietnam, a territory that includes 5 provinces, different ethnic minority groups live, for the most part still in situations of poverty, lack of education and development. Overall, 5.8 million people live in the region, equal to 6.1% of the Vietnamese population, and among them there are about 1.1 million Catholics,

Priests, catechists and pastoral workers strive to understand in depth the ancient traditions, customs and indigenous cultures, with the idea of being present and accompanying the life of each community in the region, supporting them in their daily needs and to strengthen their faith, to live in solidarity, love and communion.

Chile - The risk of getting used to violence without asking ourselves "what kind of society are we building?"

(28-3-23) "We all want to live in a safer and more fraternal nation, but I would like to invite you to ask us a few questions: why is the world of crime and drug trafficking born and growing among us? Why has violence grown in society? Why is our coexistence at all levels more aggressive? Why are our ties more deteriorated? Why do we cross the boundaries so easily" These are the questions raised by the Bishop Sergio Pérez de Arce of Chillán during the Sunday mass he presided over, in the Metropolitan Cathedral, in honor of Second Sergeant of the Carabineros Rita Olivares Raio, who died on the morning of Sunday, March 26, hit by a shot in the head while chasing some thieves in the town of Quilpué. She was the last of the 1,232 fallen Carabineros. According to information released by the

Episcopal Conference, the ritual was attended by various authorities from the region, police officers, the presidential delegate, parliamentarians and mayors from the region.

"There is something sick among us. I think it has to do with our individualism, love of money, lack of appreciation for life, forgetting God and other essential values". the bishop calls for a public debate to be carried out in grassroots social organizations, as well as in Christian communities, on what kind of society we are building.

Group slams Indian archbishop's pledge to help Modi's party

(28-3-23) A Catholic religious group has denounced an Indian archbishop's offer of support to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pro-Hindu party in next year's general elections.

The Forum of Religious for Justice and Peace, comprising religious priests and nuns, in a March 27 statement said, "We are shocked by the recent statement by Archbishop Joseph Pamplany of Tellicherry in which he extended support to Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party "if prices of rubber are hiked to Rs 300 (US\$3.6) per kg."

It is not proper for a bishop to gather votes for a political party "that is accused of targeting minority Christians across the country," said Father Cedric Prakash, who is based in Modi's home state of Gujarat. "The archbishop's announcement is against the basic teachings of Christ, especially inclusiveness," the Jesuit priest, a member of the FORUM, told UCA News on March 28.

Archbishop Pamplany, based in southern Kerala state, assured Modi's party his help in winning a seat in the upcoming general elections, at a recent farmers' rally organized by the Catholic Congress in Kannur. The assurance came on the condition that the Bharatiya Janata Party-led federal government assist struggling rubber farmers.

"Coming from a member of the hierarchy, such 'assurances' are unacceptable, deeply regrettable and bound to have serious long-term repercussions," the FORUM said in its statement.

Philippine bishops warn against 'Catholic-Freemasons'

(28-3-23) Filipino bishops have clarified their position on a canonically banned fraternity called Freemasons after allegations surfaced that a growing number of its members participate in church activities. The Commission on the Doctrine of Faith of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines issued a statement on March 24 to reiterate their stance on *the Free and Accepted Masons of the Philippines*.

The Philippine hierarchy, "as early as 1954 up until the present" has always defended the Catholic magisterial position on "the unacceptability of Masonry, given its serious errors" both in its philosophical tenets and practices, the commission said.

North Korean women trafficked into sex trade in China

(28-3-23) Thousands of women who fled North Korea have been trafficked into a multi-million-dollar sex trade industry in a border region in China, reports a rights group.

Seoul-based Database Center for North Korean Human Rights documented more than 82,000 cases of violation of the rights of North Koreans including thousands of women. About 70-80 percent of female refugees are forced into sex slavery with no hope of justice, according to the rights groups.

29-3-23

Pope hospitalized with respiratory infection

(29-3-23) Pope Francis has been hospitalized with a respiratory infection that will require "some days" of treatment, the Vatican has disclosed.

The Pope checked into Gemelli Hospital after his public audience on March 29. A Vatican statement at the time indicated that he would undergo medical tests that had been "previously scheduled."



Later in the day, however, Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni revealed: “In recent days Pope Francis has complained of some difficulty breathing.” The hospital tests revealed the infection, he said.

Top Vatican abuse expert resigns from papal commission

(29-3-23) Father Hans Zollner, SJ, the Vatican’s leading spokesman on sex-abuse issues, has resigned from the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors.

In announcing his decision to step down, Father Zollner said that he remained committed to the goal of protection children. He said, however: Over the last years, I have grown increasingly concerned with how the commission, in my perception, has gone about achieving that goal, particularly in the areas of responsibility, compliance, accountability, and transparency.

Father Zollner’s public statement expressed dissatisfaction with the Commission’s organization, staffing, financial accounting, decision-making processes, and relations with the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Papal audience: how zeal of St. Paul was transformed

(29-3-23) At his weekly public audience on March 29, Pope Francis spoke on the zeal of St. Paul, and how it was dramatically transformed from a crusade to suppress the Christian faith into a boundless energy for the spread of the Gospel. The following is the summary of his talk:

In our continuing catechesis on apostolic zeal, we now consider some of the great men and women in the history of the Church whose lives exemplify love for Christ and passion for the spread of the Gospel. We begin, naturally, with the Apostle Paul. Paul’s encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus transformed his zeal for the Law, which had led him to persecute Christians, into a consuming desire to proclaim the Gospel of God’s loving mercy, revealed in the paschal mystery. Paul’s conversion was truly a profound experience of death and resurrection; reborn in Christ, he became a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17), now filled with zeal to carry the good news of our salvation to all the nations. Paul’s example shows us that at the heart of all missionary zeal is a living encounter with the risen Lord. It also shows us that zeal for the Gospel can never justify violence or persecution in the name of the God of mercy, who invites us freely to accept his gift of new life by believing in the Gospel of Jesus his Son.

Orthodox monks move out of Kyiv monastery after lease terminated

(29-3-23) Monks of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) have begun moving out of the historic Monastery of the Caves in Kyiv, after the government terminated their lease.

The Ukrainian government has tightened restrictions on the UOC, which has been affiliated with the Patriarchate of Moscow, and now threatens to move against other UOC monasteries. Spokesmen for the Orthodox Church have pleaded for an end to the government’s campaign, pointing out that the UOC has distanced itself from Moscow since the Russian invasion.

(29-3-23) Chinese government officials have offered monetary rewards for those who report “illegal religious activities.”



Papal condolences to Nashville victims, Mexican migrants facility fire victims

(29-3-23) Pope Francis has express “his heartfelt condolences and the assurance of his prayers” after the mass shooting in Nashville, USA. He condemned the “senseless act of violence.”

Pope Francis had thoughts and requests for prayers for the 38 people who died on 28 March in a facility for migrants in Ciudad Juarez in

Mexico, close to the border with Texas.

At least 38 people died in the fire that tore through the migrant processing centre near the Stanton-Lerdo Bridge, which links Mexico and the US. It has emerged, fear of imminent deportation sparked a

protest that resulted in several migrants setting mattresses ablaze in the centre, where sixty-eight men were held while their migration requests were being processed.

They were from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela.

Nigeria - The scourge of the kidnappings of priests in Nigeria is part of a larger phenomenon

(29-3-23) From 2006 to 2023, 53 priests in Nigeria have been kidnapped, 12 attacked and 16 killed. In seventeen years, 81 priests in Nigeria have been victims of attacks. These are the data reported to Fides by the Bishops' Conference in Nigeria on the kidnappings and killings of priests in the African country.

The scourge of kidnappings of priests and religious in Nigeria has long been known and is part of a broader phenomenon of kidnappings that target, among others, foreigners, businessmen, politicians, government officials, diplomats and traditional rulers, but also ordinary citizens including students and schoolchildren, often victims of mass abductions.

Northern Nigeria is the area where the kidnapping problem has long been linked to the presence of terrorist groups, beginning with Boko Haram. But in recent years the phenomenon has spread to different parts of Nigeria, including the south, where the scourge of kidnapping is intertwined with secessionist claims.

Kyrgyzstan - New details on the intervention of armed agents in the Catholic church of Talas

(29-3-23) New details have emerged that clarify the dynamics and scope of the events that took place on Sunday March 26 in the Catholic parish of Saint Nicholas in Talas, Kyrgyzstan, where at the end of the evening Eucharistic celebration, when the faithful began to leave the church, some policemen and agents of the State Committee for National Security entered the place of worship armed, forcing those who were leaving to return to the building.

The officers fined Sr. Daniela Činčilová and Sr. Eva Eliašová, Slovak citizens of the School Sisters of St. Francis Congregation, USD 90 each, in criminal proceedings under Article 142 ("Violation of the legislation on religious freedom and religious organizations") of the Penal Code of the Republic. According to the authorities who ordered the intervention of the police, the nuns are responsible for illegally preaching Catholicism among the inhabitants of Talas without authorization from the State Commission for Religious Affairs. During the mass, the two Slovak missionaries limited themselves to reading from the ambo the two readings provided by the liturgical calendar, that is, they did not preach or preside over the celebration of the Eucharist, both actions that a foreign citizen in Kyrgyzstan can only carry out if in possession of a special certificate issued by the competent government bodies.

Haiti - Father Jean-Yves Médidor: "During the days of the kidnapping, the strength of prayer sustained me"

(29-3-23) A week after his release, Father Jean-Yves Médidor, a missionary of the Clerics of Saint Viator kidnapped in Croix des Bouquets on March 10, told Agenzia Fides the ordeal of his kidnapping.

"It was a very painful moment. Seven armed men took me out of the vehicle I was in. They blindfolded me and tied my hands with shoelaces to take me to the place of confinement. We were 30 people divided into two small rooms. There were two beds for 10 people. The other hostages had to make do with pieces of cardboard placed on the floor. An hour after the kidnapping, the leader of the armed gang asked me to call home to announce my kidnapping. The conditions were very precarious, we were fed once a day, we had no drinking water, no toilets...we used a hole for our needs". "For me, it was another experience in my spiritual journey - added Fr. Médidor. My relationship with God has strengthened. I was able to strengthen ties with an evangelical pastor who was kidnapped with me. Unfortunately, he hasn't been released yet. We prayed together, even with other prisoners like us. There were even gang members being held in detention in cells"..."I felt the power of prayer in these difficult times," the missionary concluded.



Bangladesh Church seeks to tackle abuse against women

(29-3-23) Catholic Church in Bangladesh is in the process of forming a team to tackle increasing abuses women face in their homes, workstations, and other places, says a church official. Catholic bishops in Bangladesh have verbally agreed to form a team to tackle increasing abuses women face in their homes, workstations, and other places led by the Women Desk of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh to tackle abuses against women. This is said by the desk's convenor and social activist Rita Roselin Costa.

"We are discussing setting up a team to take actions including legal action at the earliest if any women are subjected to any form of abuse," Costa told UCA News on March 29. Costa did not provide a definite date for the launch. The team will have representatives in all eight dioceses and cover all Christian denominations, she said.

Costa spoke to UCA News a day after the country office of the international development organization, Oxfam, released a report that said the majority of Bangladeshi women in the workplace are subjected to abuses.

Filipino drugs war victims pin hope on ICC probe

(29-3-23) The International Criminal Court rejecting the Philippine government's appeal to suspend a probe into the 'war on drugs' has reignited hope among families of victims.

The ICC's Appeals Chamber rejected the appeal on March 27 reviving hopes of justice among the families of some 29,000 people, who were killed in the anti-drug campaign of former President Rodrigo Duterte in 2016.

The former president's daughter Sara Duterte serves as vice president in the present government of Ferdinand Marcos Jr and the Marcoses and the Dutertes are known political allies.



Church leaders ask Papuan rebels to free NZ pilot

(29-3-23) Church leaders in Indonesia's Papua province have asked the separatist group to release a New Zealand pilot, held hostage for nearly two months to garner international support for the Papuan independence movement.

"This act of hostage-taking cannot be justified by traditional norms and the Christian faith that we recognize as a guide in today's life," said an open letter issued by Papua Church Council on March 27.

Philip Mark Mehrtens, 37, a pilot for Indonesian aviation company Susi Air, has been held hostage by the West Papua Liberation National Army – Free Papua Organization (TPNPB-OPM) since Feb. 7 in Nduga Regency in Papua Highlands.

The Church council said the delay in releasing Mehrtens will give the Indonesian government legitimacy to deploy more troops in Papua and to set up more security bases in the region. The Church leader said they were worried about the pilot's condition as attempts by the Indonesian government to free the pilot, including through diplomatic routes involving New Zealand, failed. On its part, New Zealand has sent three diplomats to monitor the search for the pilot.

30-3-23

Vatican repudiates 'doctrine of discovery'

(30-3-23) The Vatican has formally repudiated the "doctrine of discovery," which was used by colonial powers starting in the 15th century to justify the seizure of native lands in the New World.

In a joint statement issued on March 30 by the Dicastery for Culture and the Dicastery for Integral Human Development, the Vatican rejected "those concepts that fail to recognize the inherent human rights of indigenous peoples, including what has become known as the legal and political 'doctrine of discovery.'"

The “doctrine of discovery” was supported by three papal bulls, released by Popes Nicholas V and Alexander VI between 1452 and 1493. But the March 30 statement said that these documents, “written in a specific historical period and linked to political questions, have never been considered expressions of the Catholic faith.” Therefore, the statement said, the doctrine “is not a part of the teaching of the Catholic Church.”

This joint statement was a response to requests from indigenous groups in North America. During his visit to Canada last year, Pope Francis had apologized for the injustices of colonial exploitation, and promised that the Vatican would issue a more formal document reaffirming the rights of native peoples. Phil Fontaine, a spokesman for the First Nations of Canada, said that the new Vatican document was a “wonderful” response.

Pope’s condition ‘improving,’ Vatican says

(30-3-23) The medical condition of Pope Francis is “progressively improving” after a night in Gemelli Hospital, the Vatican announced on March 30.

The Pope was hospitalized after his regular public audience on Wednesday. Although the Vatican originally said that he would undergo tests that had been previously scheduled, he was taken to the hospital by ambulance, in obvious distress, and after announcement revealed that he had experienced trouble in breathing. After a quiet night, the Vatican announced on Thursday, the Pontiff’s “clinical picture is progressively improving and he is continuing with his planned treatment.”

Tests showed no evidence of pneumonia or Covid, the Vatican disclosed. The Pope is being treated for “severe bronchitis.”

Pope Francis was able to do some work on Thursday morning, the Vatican said, and before lunch “he received the Eucharist.” The wording of that announcement suggests that the Pope was not healthy enough to celebrate Mass himself.

The Vatican announced the cancellation of the Pope’s scheduled activities for March 30 and 31. No changes have yet been made in plans for the Pontiff to lead the liturgical celebrations of Holy Week and the Easter Triduum.



Sacked Maltese priest in fight with UK’s National Health Service over Catholic teaching on marriage

(30-3-23) Father Patrick Pullicino, a former neuroscience professor, was fired from his position as a psychiatric hospital chaplain after he responded to a patient’s question about Catholic teaching on same-sex marriage.

The United Kingdom’s National Health Service (NHS) told the priest in an email that its “policy on equality and diversity ... takes precedence over religious beliefs.” The priest has filed suit.

“There does not appear to be a place for Christian teaching or belief in the NHS,” Father Pullicino said. “In a truly democratic society where all faiths and beliefs are respected, I would not have been treated as I was.”

Ukrainian Catholic leader calls for release of Chernobyl soldiers

(30-3-23) Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, the head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, called for the release of 167 soldiers whom Russian forces captured a year ago when they took over the Chernobyl nuclear plant.

“A year has passed since then — more than 9,408 hours of hell, severe abuse, and exhaustion in the dungeons of Russian torture chambers,” the Eastern Catholic church said in a statement. The Major Archbishop “regularly submits lists of prisoners of war to the Pope,” and the Pope “is involved in all possible channels to liberate Ukrainian prisoners.”

Kenya - Drought emergency in Turkana County: the population is in danger of a serious humanitarian crisis

(30-3-23) While anti-government riots against the high cost of living continue throughout the country (see Fides, 28/3/2023), the population of northern Kenya, in addition to the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, is going through a serious humanitarian crisis. Five seasons without a drop of rain, a ruthless nature due to the scorching sun and a drought that has lasted for more than three years, make the living conditions of the inhabitants of Turkana, one of the 47 counties of Kenya located in the ex Rift Valley Province, inhuman and desperate. This is what Father Robbin Kamemba, Provincial Superior of the Society for African Missions (SMA) in Kenya, told Agenzia Fides. "Life here is hard, people walk more than 45 km in search of water, compared to the usual 2-3 km. Furthermore, due to the crops that have been lost, they are no longer able to obtain food for themselves and they are forced to rely on external aid", adds Fr. Kamemba. According to some scientists, some areas are at risk of no longer being suitable for grazing in the future.

Iraq - Bishops of the "Nineveh Council": Christians could boycott the upcoming elections



(30-3-23) The Bishops of the Churches present in Mosul and in the Nineveh Plain, in a striking initiative, have announced the possible boycott of the next rounds of elections by the Christian component of the Iraqi population, if the demands raised within this component and aimed at protecting the spaces of political representation guaranteed to Christian candidates in Parliament and in national and local political institutions by the same electoral laws currently in force are not taken into consideration.

The Bishops who make up the so-called "Nineveh Council" expressed their concerns in a lengthy and articulate statement addressed in particular to the institutional representatives of the Iraqi Parliament.

Philippines - The Gospel translated into the Cuyonon language, to "connect with God"

(30-3-23) Making the Gospel understandable and "connecting with God" the populations who speak the indigenous Cuyonon language, settled mainly on the island of Palawan and on other islands in the centre of the Philippines: With this intention, a translation of the New Testament into the Cuyonon language was presented in Puerto Princesa, coinciding with the 151st anniversary of the first Mass celebrated in Palawan and at the time when the Apostolic Vicariates of Puerto Princesa and Taytay (which cover the entire island) celebrate the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the Christian faith in the Palawan area, which took place in 1622, when the Augustinian Recollect missionaries arrived in the city of Cuyo.

The work, a "faithful translation" of the fifth edition of the Greek New Testament of the United Bible Societies, is an initiative of the "Philippine Bible Society", an ecumenical movement that brings together specialists and biblical scholars of different denominations.

China - Formation activities for catechists and lay people resume after three years of difficulties linked to the pandemic

(30-3-23) Three years have passed since the life of the Catholic community in China began to be conditioned and, so to speak, "slowed down" due to the Covid 19 pandemic. At last now many ordinary activities of Catholic communities Chinese have been able to resume their normal rhythms and liveliness. An example is the case of the parish of Chaoyang, in the ecclesial community of Liaoning, where a formation course on the mission and the role of the laity in the life of the Church was held from March 20 to 22.

India - Appointment of Auxiliary Bishop of Aizawl

(30-3-23) The Holy Father Francis has appointed the Reverend Joachim Walder, of the clergy of Aizawl, until now episcopal vicar of the Barak Valley Region, as auxiliary of the diocese of Aizawl, assigning him the titular see of Legia.

Msgr. Joachim Walder was born on 20 April 1956 in Nirkan, Bantwal Taluk, in the diocese of Mangalore, Karnataka State. After his priestly studies, he was ordained a priest on 26 April 1986. He has been parish priest, dean of Barrak Valley and director of schools. Since 2018, he has been episcopal vicar of the Barak Valley Region.

Asian bishops clash over Catholic media platform

(30-3-23) The president of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) has ordered a leading Asian Catholic media platform to "suspend all activities and programs"—and the president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) responded by insisting that the Manila-based platform will continue its operations.

Cardinal Charles Maung Bo of Yangon (Myanmar) and Bishop Pablo Virgilio David of Kalookan (Philippines) are at odds over the recent firing of the program director of Radio Veritas Asia (RVA). Founded in the Philippines in 1969 as an Asian Catholic radio station, RVA has been operated by the FABC since 1974 and became an all-digital media platform in 2018.

Though operated by the FABC, RVA is owned by a Philippine bishops' entity, the Philippine Radio Educational and Information Center (PREIC), founded in 1961 to operate Radio Veritas Philippines, the forerunner of RVA. PREIC ordered the firing of Father Bernard Dashi Tang, RVA's program director; Cardinal Bo cited the removal in his own order to RVA to suspend its activities.



Indian pastor, wife freed after 30 days behind bars

(30-3-23) A Protestant couple accused of religious conversion in a northern Indian state has been released from jail after spending 30 days behind bars.

"Pastor John and his wife were granted bail and were released on March 27 after a district court observed that allegations of religious conversion against them could not be proved," their lawyer, who did not want to be named, told UCA News on March 29. Pastor Santosh John and his wife, Jiji John, were arrested on Feb. 26 following complaints of religious conversion by Bajrang Dal, a group of Hindu hardliners, in Uttar Pradesh, India's largest state which is ruled by the pro-Hindu party of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The lawyer said that "the hardline Hindu group could not give any solid evidence" against the couple who were picked up while conducting Sunday prayers in the state's Ghaziabad district. "The allegation that the pastor and his wife distributed some T-shirts, pamphlets and conducted prayer services at their rented house does not prove that they have been forcing people to change religion," the court observed while releasing the couple.

Priest gets bail after raid by Indian child rights panel

(30-3-23) A court has granted bail to a Catholic priest four days after his arrest and detention in a central Indian state where child rights panels are on an inspection spree of Church-run schools and institutions to prevent alleged religious conversions.

Father R B Dionysius, principal of St. Mary's School, in Morena district in Madhya Pradesh, ruled by the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was released on March 28 after being held on multiple charges, including disturbing the peace and using criminal force against a public servant on duty.

People familiar with the development said the priest was framed in a false case to tarnish the image of the Catholic school in Gwalior diocese, and in a state where Christians make up a mere 0.29 percent of its 72 million population. "Father Dionysius is traumatized," said a fellow priest from the diocese who did not want to be named. We are now helping him to recover, the priest added.

Father Dionysius was arrested on March 25 following a surprise raid on his residence within the school campus by government officials, under the leadership of Nivedita Sharma, a member of the

state's commission for the protection of child rights. After the raid, Sharma told media people that the team seized liquor bottles, condoms, and religious objects.

It was part of a well-orchestrated strategy to defame the priest and the school, which enjoys a good reputation in the locality, the diocesan priest added. "Nearly 1,800 students are studying at St. Mary's School and not a single parent or student made a complaint," the priest noted. The diocesan priest said the state child rights panel and district officials were targeting only Christian schools in Gwalior, where former untouchables (Dalits) and tribal people make up 23 percent of its 6,098,000 population.

31-3-23



Pope recovering, expected ready for Palm Sunday Mass

(31-3-23) Pope Francis is recovering quickly from a bronchial infection, will probably be released from Gemelli Hospital on Saturday, and is "expected to be present" at Palm Sunday Mass in St. Peter's Square on April 2, the Vatican has announced.

The Pope experienced a "marked improvement" with the intravenous administration of antibiotics, after being hospitalized on Wednesday with breathing difficulties. By Thursday evening he was sharing pizza with the hospital staff.

On Friday the Pope visited the hospital's pediatric ward, distributing small gifts to the children there. He also baptized a newborn child.

Vatican rejects German Church's plans for laity to preach homilies, conduct baptisms

(31-3-23) Cardinal Arthur Roche, Prefect of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, has written a seven-page letter to Bishop Georg Bätzing of Limburg, head of the German Bishops' Conference, rejecting recent resolutions of the German Synodal Way on lay homilies and lay baptisms.

Ghana's leading bishop urges government to reject American aid if it is tied to LGBTQ agenda

(31-3-23) Bishop Matthew Gyamfi, president of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, urged the government to reject \$139M in US foreign aid if "the aid is tied to Ghana accepting LGBT."

In 2021, the bishops' conference supported legislation that would "nip in the bud the socio-moral canker of the Lesbian, Gay, bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual Plus (LGBTQIA+)."

The West African nation of 33.1 million is 73% Christian (16% Catholic), 18% Muslim, and 8% ethnic religionist.

Vatican action halts Christchurch's Catholic cathedral building plan

(31-3-23) Responding to an appeal from a group of local Catholics, the Apostolic Signatura has temporarily halted plans to build a new cathedral in Christchurch, New Zealand, the nation's leading news site has reported.

The old Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament was demolished in 2020 following an earthquake.

Pope takes step toward reviving Eastern Catholic church persecuted by czar, Stalin

(31-3-23) On March 30, Pope Francis established an apostolic administration for the faithful of the Byzantine rite in Belarus, and in doing so granted a measure of ecclesial stability to Belarusian Greek Catholics, who have long been without a hierarchy of their own.

The establishment of an apostolic administration sometimes precedes the establishment of a diocese or eparchy.

Belarus, an Eastern European nation of 9.4 million (map), is 80% Christian (65% Orthodox, 12% Catholic). Most Catholics are Latin-rite Catholics.

The Belarusian Greek Catholic Church (CNEWA profile), an Eastern Catholic church in full communion with the Holy See, arose from the Union of Brest-Litovsk in 1596. Czar Nicholas I suppressed the church in 1839 and forcibly joined it to the Russian Orthodox Church. In 2019, the

Vatican's Congregation for the Eastern Churches described Belarusian Greek Catholics as "Eastern Catholics without a hierarchy".

South Sudan - The peace process fails to advance after the change in the Ministry of Defence

(31-3-23) Immediately begin operations to disarm the civilian population, starting with the capital, Juba. This is the task assigned to the new Defense Minister of South Sudan, Chol Thon Balok, by President Salva Kiir Maryardit.

President Kiir has also instructed the minister to implement the second chapter of the peace agreement, which details the permanent ceasefire and transitional security provisions.

Kiir and his longtime rival Riek Machar signed the peace deal in 2018 that ended a five-year civil war that killed 400,000 people. An agreement that has had difficulties to be fully implemented in recent years despite the fact that Machar was reinstated in the position of first vice president that he held before the conflict broke out in December 2013.

The appointment of the new defense minister aroused strong opposition from Machar, as Chol Thon Balok, who belongs to the President's party, took the place of Angelina Teny, Machar's wife. On March 3, Kiir dismissed her along with the Home Secretary. Dismissals that were branded as "Kiir's unilateral decision" by Machar's party.

Kenya - Twenty missionary sisters at the service of evangelization among people in difficulty

(31-3-23) Famine, drought, early marriages, orphans, the elderly, human promotion, evangelization, these are some of the priorities of the sisters of the Congregation of the Social Missionaries of the Church who work in Kenya.

"We are the Congregation of Social Missionaries of the Church, an Ecuadorian foundation that has been working in Kenya since 2000", explained to Fides Sr. Ligia Giròn, who, together with her sisters, follows various humanitarian contexts in the African country. "We arrived in Kenya for a 3-year missionary experience, but then we decided to stay, after realizing that our presence in the middle of the desert, and our charisma gave many young people the desire to serve the Church through our Congregation. There are currently 20 of us, including 17 Kenyans and 3 Ecuadorians. We mainly take care of pre-school children, from 0 to 7 years of age, in very remote areas near Ethiopia.

China - New opportunities for communion and unity for the diocese of Baoding

(31-3-23) After the difficult time of the pandemic, when churches were closed due to health provisions, even in the diocese of Baoding, in the Chinese province of Hebei, the daily life of the local Catholic community shows signals that indicate that it is "restarting". With the reopenings inaugurated on the occasion of the Chinese New Year, the Eucharistic liturgies celebrated on the occasion of the consecration and dedication of new churches provided an opportunity to experience and manifest communion and ecclesial unity among baptized Catholics.

Malaysia - The mission of the Church "on a synodal journey": towards the pastoral assembly in peninsular Malaysia

(31-3-23) The diocesan pastoral Peninsular Malaysia - which is between summer and autumn need to listen to the "cry of the inculturation and dialogue, aware called to "trace new paths". The discussion concern evangelization and the mission of the Church, indicated the members of the team in charge of preparing the meeting, formed by the bishops and a small number of representatives of the three dioceses of peninsular Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Malacca-Johore).



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Guatemala- Temporary reception centres for immigrants "end up being detention centres, where human rights are violated"

(31-3-23) "As we have said more than once, 'Guatemala has the primary obligation to fulfill and enforce the rights of male and female citizens to remain in their country in dignified conditions and in accordance with their rights', failing to comply with this responsibility, Guatemala and especially the officials on duty are co-responsible for the events that occurred in the fire at the immigration station in Mexico". This is what the Pastoral Care of Human Mobility of the Episcopal Conference of Guatemala writes, in a "public pronouncement of solidarity and indignation" about the tragic fire in Ciudad Juárez that has cost the lives of 39 migrants.

The Bishops' text underlines that these temporary reception centres for migrants "end up being detention centres, where the human rights of people in forced mobility are violated".

Indian govt seeks more time to report on Christian persecution

(31-3-23) India's top court has granted the federal government more time to provide details of alleged attacks against Christians in the country.

Hearing a petition on March 29, the Supreme Court allowed the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party-led government more time and posted the next hearing on April 14.

The public interest litigation seeks the court's directions to stop alleged attacks against Christian priests and Christian institutions across the country. The petition was filed in 2021 by Archbishop Peter Machado of Bangalore along with the National Solidarity Forum and the Evangelical Fellowship of India.

The three-judge bench headed by Supreme Court Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud adjourned the hearing after the attorney sought more time to respond to the court's earlier direction to verify the factual position of alleged attacks against Christians, listed in the petition.

Eight Indian states, most of them ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party, were told on Sept. 1, 2022, to provide details on preliminary police reports, the status of the investigations, arrests made, and charges filed in court for prosecuting the culprits.

The case will now be further delayed and the petitioners are worried as the government has been delaying the hearing under some pretext or the other. Attacks on Christians have been increasing drastically during the pendency of the petition. According to the United Christian Forum, the country witnessed 597 incidents of attack against Christians in 2022.



Catholics forced to skip fasting in cash-strapped Pakistan

(31-3-23) Thousands of poor Catholics across Pakistan are unable to observe their lent traditions of abstinence and day-long fasting as they struggle to survive amid severe inflation in a country hit by an economic crisis.

"Poor people have hardly anything to eat. How can you expect them to fast for the entire day," Sister Rubi Munir, the Good Shepherd nun, who works

among them, asked.

Catholics in the Muslim-majority nation traditionally spend the whole day without food and drink from dawn to dusk for a month during the Lent period. They break the fast by eating in the evening just as Muslims do during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, which began on March 23 this year.

Economically weak, they are worse off this Lent struggling to survive amid severe inflation.

Prayers sought for Chinese Christians held for 'selling Bibles'

(31-3-23) Christians in a northern Chinese province have started a prayer campaign for the well-being and release of local Christians arrested two years ago and who face lengthy jail terms for allegedly selling Bibles "illegally."

A prayer request for Wang Honglan and several Christians was circulated in Protestant house churches in Hohhot, the provincial capital of Inner Mongolia on March 28, *Bitter Winter*, an online magazine which covers religious freedom and human rights in China, reported.

They were arrested in April 2021 and charged with operating an "illegal business" though they were selling Bibles printed by a government-authorized publisher.

In Communist China, selling Bibles printed without government authorization is a criminal offense, which can result in up to 15 years imprisonment.

1-4-23

Russia - The Catholic community in Moscow commemorates Father Konstantin Budkiewicz 100 years after his execution

(1-4-23) "The cross is not a source of bitterness and disappointment, but is already the beginning of glory". This is how Paolo Pezzi, Metropolitan Archbishop of the Mother of God in Moscow, spoke on Friday, March 31, during the homily of the Eucharistic celebration he presided over on the occasion of the centenary of the execution of priest Konstantin Budkiewicz. During the Mass, celebrated in the Catholic cathedral of Moscow, prayers were also held for the cause of beatification in progress, set up for the Polish priest and other men and women who, in the twenties and thirties, testified to the faith in Christ in the USSR.

It was precisely in March of a hundred years ago that the process against the Catholic Church by the Leninist government began in Moscow. Father Budkiewicz was executed, on March 31, precisely, on Holy Saturday that year for the Catholic community - an "ascent to Heaven for the culmination of life", as Archbishop Pezzi defined it.

Burkina Faso - A religious of the Missionaries of Africa killed by mistake

(1-4-23) "It was a tragic accident", a person in charge of the General House of the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) told Agenzia Fides, confirming the accidental murder of one of his community confreres in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso. Brother Moses Simukonde Sens, 35, originally from Zambia, was killed by a stray bullet on the evening of March 29 near a military checkpoint.

"The tragedy occurred around 9 in the evening on March 29, when our brother was passing near the checkpoint set up by the military police", sources from the General House affirm. "Soldiers fired several times at individuals whom they claimed posed a threat. Unfortunately, one of the shots hit Brother Moses, killing him. The military police have apologized in an official letter to our congregation and the family of the missionary brother".

Paraguay - Laity: Samaritans of our time and our culture, for social and ecclesial transformation

(1-4-23)"According to their baptismal identity, the laity assume the commitment to be authentic Christians, so that in every social, political, economic, ecclesial reality ... they can embody values and highlight virtues that contribute to communion, to dialogue and participation". Likewise, it is the commitment of all the laity to establish the "Kingdom of God and his justice" in our society, being "salt and light" of the earth, "witnesses of the Gospel", to be compassionate Samaritans in our time and in our culture, for ecclesial and social transformation. Finally, the laity are called to contribute to the sanctification of the world.

These are some of the considerations that emerged from the meeting which, under the sign of the Year of the Laity that the Church of Paraguay has just experienced, brought together on 25 and 26 March, in Caacupé the National Coordination of the Laity of Paraguay. Lay representatives of dioceses, movements, groups and ecclesial communities were present in the National Shrine.

2-4-23

Pope at Palm Sunday Mass: Jesus turns our hearts of stone to hearts of flesh

(2-4-23) Pope Francis presided at Sunday of the Lord's Passion - his after being released from Rome's Saturday April 1st. An estimated part in the celebration that recitation of the Angelus prayer.



the Solemn Mass for Palm first public appearance Gemelli Hospital on sixty thousand faithful took concluded with the

In his homily following the Pope Francis reflected on Christ's

recitation of the Passion, cry from the Cross: 'My

God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?' "Those words bring us to the very heart of Christ's Passion, the culmination of the sufferings He endured for our salvation," the Pope said, noting that these are the only words from the Cross reported in St Matthew's Gospel."

The Holy Father noted that the sufferings of Jesus were many, and that whenever we listen to the account of the Passion, "they pierce our hearts". Pope Francis explained that these were sufferings of the body, but also of the soul and of the spirit but that amid all these sorrows, Jesus remained certain of one thing: the closeness of the Father.

"My God, why have you forsaken me?" is the most searing of all sufferings, continued the Pope, as "at Jesus' most tragic hour, He experienced abandonment by God", noted the Pope, adding that prior to that moment, "he had never called the Father by his generic name, 'God'". He experienced abandonment in order not to leave us prey to despair, in order to stay at our side forever.

The Holy Father asked the faithful gathered to remember that it is in this way that the Lord saves us and recalled that "on the cross, even as he felt utter abandonment, Jesus refused to yield to despair; instead, he prayed and trusted, commending himself into the hands of the Father, despite the distance he felt.

The Pope remembered the abandoned around us today, recalling in particular a German homeless man, Burkhard Scheffler, who died in November 2022 underneath the colonnade of Saint Peter's Square. So many people need our closeness, so many are abandoned, he added. And just as we all need the closeness of Jesus in our lives, we also must go out to find Jesus in the abandoned, those who are alone.

Pope at Angelus: May we unite in prayers for peace, intensified in Holy Week

(2-4-23) At the recitation of the Angelus, Pope Francis asked everyone to unite in prayers for peace, remembering Ukraine in particular. He exhorted everyone to live the Holy Week - as the tradition of the holy, faithful people of God teaches us, which means accompanying the Lord Jesus with faith and love.

Pope: Modern neocolonialism is a crime and a threat to peace

(2-4-23) In a message addressed to a workshop in the Vatican on neocolonialism, Pope Francis warned against modern economic and ideological colonialism. He again apologized for those Christians who contributed to the colonization of Africa and the Americas.

"No power - political, economic, ideological - is entitled to unilaterally determine the identity of a nation or social group," Pope Francis told a forum of judges for social rights gathered this week in the Vatican for an African and American intercontinental workshop on modern neocolonialism.

"The subjugation and plunder of peoples through the use of force or cultural and political penetration is a crime (...) because there are no chances for peace in a world that discards populations and oppresses to loot," the Pope wrote in a message to the participants.

"My God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus did it for us. "He became one of us to the very end, in order to be completely and definitively *one with us* so that none of us would ever again feel alone and beyond hope". He experienced abandonment in order not to leave us prey to despair, in order to stay at our side forever. -Pope Francis, Palm Sunday Angelus 2 April 2021