

CATHOLIC WORLD LAST WEEK

(CWLW)

12-18 Dec 2022

12-12-22



Pope asks world leaders for clemency before Christmas

(12-12-22) Pope Francis has urged world leaders to make a “gesture of clemency,” releasing prisoners in the days before Christmas.

“So that this time marked by tensions, injustice and conflicts may be opened to the grace that comes from the Lord,” the Pontiff suggests a gesture “towards our brothers and sisters who are deprived of their liberty and who are held eligible to benefit from such a provision.”

The appeal echoes a similar request that Pope Francis made in 2016, when he called for a Jubilee for Prisoners as part of the Year of Mercy.

Abuse survivors demand canonical action against leading German bishop

(12-12-22) An advisory board of German sex-abuse survivors is demanding a canonical trial for Bishop Franz-Josef Bode, the vice president of the German bishops’ conference and of their Synodal Path.

A September report on the handling of abuse complaints in the Osnabrück diocese, which Bishop Bode has led since 1995, found “a more perpetrator-oriented than victim-oriented attitude.” Despite the ensuing criticism, Bishop Bode has said that he does not plan to resign.

The sex-abuse survivors’ group called upon Archbishop Stefan Hesse of Hamburg, the metropolitan archdiocese, to open an investigation of Bishop Bode under the terms of *Vos Estis*.

Pope speaks of ‘worrying resurgence’ of anti-Semitism

(12-12-22) Speaking on December 12 to a French group dedicated to friendship between Christians and Jews, Pope Francis applauded their work, saying that it is particularly necessary today.

Inter-religious cooperation is vital, the Pope said, “in these hostile times, in which attitudes of closure and rejection of the other are becoming more numerous, not least with the worrying resurgence of anti-Semitism, particularly in Europe

Pope lauds group for building inclusive communities for visually impaired

(12-12-22) At a December 12 meeting with members of the Italian Union of Blind and Partially Sighted Persons, Pope Francis praised the group for helping to build communities “where everyone can participate without being ashamed of their limitations and weaknesses, cooperating with others to support each other.”

The Pontiff said that it is wrong to take the “pietistic attitude” of treating people with impaired vision simply as disabled. “We all need each other,” he said, “not only people with physical fragilities.”

Martyr for chastity beatified in Brazil

(12-12-22) Blessed Isabel Cristina Mrad Campos (1962-1982), who was killed as she defended her chastity, was beatified as a virgin martyr in her hometown of Barbacena, Brazil, on December 10. Cardinal Raymundo Damasceno Assis, the retired archbishop of Aparecida, celebrated the Mass of beatification.

“This young woman was killed in 1982 at the age of 20, in hatred of the faith, for having defended her dignity as a woman and the value of her chastity,” Pope Francis said. “May her heroic example inspire in particular the young to render generous witness of faith and adherence to the Gospel.”

Iraqi Christians, forced out of refugee camp, find shelter in former seminary (Fides)

Iraqi Christians who are being evicted from a refugee camp in Baghdad are now being offered shelter in a former seminary.

About 120 Christian families, who had been living in the refugee camp since the Islamic State drove them from their homes in the Nineveh Plain in 2014, will be housed in what had been a Chaldean Catholic seminary in Dora. They had been forced out of the refugee camp by developers looking to build a shopping center.



Jimmy Lai given 5-year sentence

(12-12-22) Hong Kong publisher and democracy activist Jimmy Lai has been sentenced to a 5-year prison term, and fined more than \$250,000, after being convicted of leasing office space illegally. He still faces more serious charges of conspiring with foreign powers against China.

Commission outraged by omission of Nigeria, India from State Dept. religious freedom watchlist

(12-12-22) The US State Department recently named 12 nations “countries of particular concern” (CPCs) for “having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom.”

“There is no justification for the State Department’s failure to recognize Nigeria or India as egregious violators of religious freedom, as they each clearly meet the legal standards for designation as CPCs,” the bipartisan US Commission on International Religious Freedom stated in response. (The Commission makes recommendations to the State Department about CPC designees, but the State Department is free to disregard the recommendations.)

English bishop resigns, citing ‘too great a burden’

(12-12-22) Bishop Robert Byrne of Hexham and Newcastle, England, has resigned at the age of 68, explaining that “the office of the diocesan bishop has become too great a burden” for him.

Bishop Byrne, who took up his post in 2019, said that he came to the decision to step down after a long period of prayer and reflection, and thanked Pope Francis for accepting his early retirement.

Italy - Reduce the social and educational impact of the pandemic, especially on girls in less developed countries

(12-12-22) Since the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world in March 2020, it is estimated that more than 111 million students have dropped out of school in developing countries. Lockdowns and restrictions are estimated to have forced millions of girls in less developed countries to drop out of school and many of them have never returned, leaving them at risk of early marriage and other forms of violence and exploitation. During this unprecedented critical situation, four international women’s religious congregations - The Sisters of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, together with the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, the Comboni Missionaries and the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions - have continued their mission to protect the weakest, safeguard them and guarantee the rights of women, youth and children in particular. At a recent meeting held in Rome, at the headquarters of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG), the religious, who have always been at the forefront of promoting human rights in the countries of the South of the world, presented the report 'How are the Girls? A study on the Rights of Girls in six countries during the Covid-19 Pandemic', the result of a continued commitment to reduce the social and educational impact of the pandemic, especially on girls between the ages of 10 and 20.

The countries are Kenya, South Sudan, India, Nepal, Ecuador and Peru.

Nigeria - Assaults on road construction sites in Imo State. The Bishop of Okigwe wonders who has an interest in blocking development in the area

(12-12-22) Bishop Solomon Amanchukwu Amatu of Okigwe, has regretted the attacks on the construction company that works on the improvement of the Owerri-Umuahia and Owerri-Okigwe roads, in the State of Imo, in the south-east of Nigeria.

During the homily of the Mass on Sunday, December 11, the bishop asked himself who has an interest in blocking the work of a project that aims to contribute to the development of Imo State. Between 9 and 11 December, armed gangs killed two policemen and an army officer who were providing security for construction workers along the Owerri-Okigwe road and the Owerri Umuahia road.

Pakistan - "Conversion without consent": a plague for Pakistani society

"Conversion without Consent": presented on December 11 by "Justice" in collaboration with "Jubilee Campaign". The consideration 100 cases of conversions, forced and early women belonging to the throughout Pakistan, which between January 2019 and



this is the title of the report the Pakistani NGO "Voice for the international NGO report takes into kidnappings, forced religious marriages of girls and Christian community occurred in the period October 2022. According to

the data, the year 2021 registered 42 cases and showed an increase in the number of formally reported cases in 2019 (there were 27 cases) and 2020 (12 cases). Data shows that the highest number of total cases, 86%, is reported in Punjab province alone.

The president of "Voice for Justice", Joseph Jansen, stated that "it is common to take advantage of a position of power to encourage marginalized people to convert, which amounts to coercion". The right to religious freedom does not protect against "improper proselytism", that is, the offer of material or social advantages or the application of improper pressure in order to obtain new members, a phenomenon that affects the most vulnerable citizens and girls.

"The phenomenon of forced conversions reveals the state's inability to implement and enforce existing laws," he added.

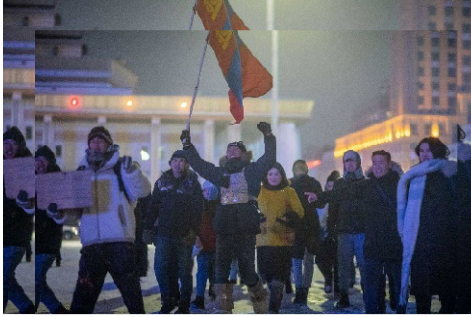
Iraq - The former seminary will welcome Christian refugees "evicted" from the "refugee camp of the Virgin Mary"

(12-12-22) The structures of the former Chaldean seminary located in Dora, a suburb of Baghdad, were renovated in a short time to house displaced Christians from Mosul and the Nineveh Plain who had so far found refuge in the Iraqi capital, occupying the refugee camps that the population had begun to call "Camp of the Virgin Mary". This is the practical solution devised by the Chaldean Patriarchate to face an emergency which recalls in many of its details and implications the hardships and sufferings experienced by the Iraqi Christian communities in the last two decades.

Colombia - The first phase of the peace talks between the Government and the ELN, the Colombian Church "permanent companion" concludes

(12-12-22) The Colombian Catholic Church has accepted the invitation to participate as a "permanent companion" in the peace talks between the Colombian government and the National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrillas, which are taking place in Caracas. on December 11.

The President of the Colombian Bishops' Conference, Archbishop Luis José Rueda of Bogota informs that Monsignor Héctor Fabio Henao "will be ready to collaborate in whatever is required to consolidate this long-awaited process for the good of our country."



Mongolians brave freezing nights to fight corruption

(12-12-22) Bundled up in thick layers to battle temperatures below freezing, Mongolians are sleeping rough in the heart of their capital and say they will not leave until officials accused of corruption are punished.

Protests in the landlocked East Asian nation entered their eighth day Monday, with thousands rallying in central Ulaanbaatar furious over claims a faction of lawmakers and executives stole billions of dollars in coal.

India's Hindu nationalists, tribal Christians make strange bedfellows

(12-12-22) Two tribal Christians have emerged winners as official candidates of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home province of Gujarat hinting at a new, well-thought-out political strategy by India's pro-Hindu ruling party.

The newly elected Christian legislators from the southern tribal belt, Mohan Konkani from Vyara and Ritesh Vasava from Jhagadia, not only won but proved giant killers who trounced veterans of the electoral game.

The political message of the two victories is loud and clear — the BJP is willing to embrace the Christian community in Gujarat as a new political ally, unlike Muslims who remain politically untouchable. For the state's tribal Christians, it's a welcome change from the heady days of the vicious attacks on their churches in the southern Dangs district in 1998.

Whether this hitherto unlikely and unnatural alliance will hold is anybody's guess, but ahead of Christmas it's good news for Gujarat's Christians who number just over 300,000 or 0.50 percent of the state's 64 million people and now have two representatives in the 182-member legislative assembly.

Hong Kong's pro-democracy protesters jailed for rioting

(12-12-22) A court in Hong Kong handed jail terms to eight pro-democracy activists on charges of rioting and attacking a police station during the anti-extradition bills in 2019.

The District Judge delivered the verdict on Dec. 12, while noting that the defendants were aware of the law and had disregarded it, Hong Kong Free Press (HKFP) reported.

The judge ruled that all the eight defendants "came prepared" wearing similar attires and some were found carrying weapons and tools that could be used to damage property.

13-12-22

Christian workers must feel at home in Church communities, Pope Francis says

(13-12-22) "Social inequalities, forms of slavery and exploitation, family poverty due to lack of work or poorly paid work are realities that need to be heard in our Church communities," Pope Francis said in an address to members of the Movimento Cristiano Lavoratori (Movement of Christian Workers), which is commemorating its 50th anniversary.

Cardinal Parolin sees 'glimmer of hope' in Ukraine (Fides)

(13-12-22) Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican Secretary of State, said that "we have seen a glimmer of hope for a possible resumption of negotiations in Ukraine" recently, but quickly added that the hope was dampened by "lockdowns and the escalation of bombing."

Speaking at an event hosted by the Italian embassy to the Holy See, Cardinal Parolin said that "it is terrifying that we have returned to talk about the use of nuclear weapons and atomic warfare as a possible eventuality." He decried the "race to rearmament," and said that "war itself is an error and an abomination."

The cardinal concluded that "we cannot but ask ourselves whether we are doing everything, everything possible to put an end to this tragedy."

'Be missionaries of peace,' Pope tells Argentine archdiocese

(13-12-22) Pope Francis has sent a video message to the Archdiocese of Rosario (Argentina) for the 250th anniversary of the arrival there of an image of Our Lady of the Rosary.

"Let us invite all the parishes, schools and institutions to go on a pilgrimage to the shrine in search of grace, where one experiences the love of the Mother, the closeness of Christ and the mercy of the Father, through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the indulgences the Church offers," Pope Francis said.

Papal Twitter account has grown to over 53 million followers

The papal Twitter account made its debut with a tweet by Pope Benedict XVI on December 12, 2012. A decade later, the account has over 53 million followers.

"Thank you to all who follow me on this account which was opened 10 years ago to proclaim the joy of the Gospel," Pope Francis tweeted. "Let us continue to build up this network as a free space to promote encounter and dialogue and to value what unites us."

Scotland's bishops denounce UK Supreme Court buffer zone ruling

(13-12-22) The UK Supreme Court has ruled that efforts in Northern Ireland to suppress peaceful prayer vigils around abortion clinics do not infringe on the right to freedom of expression.

"The recent decision of the UK Supreme Court on the Northern Ireland buffer zone case is very concerning," Scotland's bishops said in a December 12 statement. "It is a decision which fails to protect basic freedoms of expression and freedom of assembly. It will no doubt embolden efforts to criminalize peaceful vigils in Scotland."



Dictatorship in Nicaragua prohibits Immaculate Conception procession

(13-12-22) "We want to express our deep sadness at this action that denies us expressing our faith in public," a Managua parish stated on its Facebook page following the government's prohibition of a Marian procession.

'Co-responsibility beyond inclusion': Vatican releases video on persons with disabilities

(13-12-22) The Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life announced recently that it would release four videos devoted to the Vatican's synod listening session with persons with disabilities. The first video, entitled "Co-responsibility as well as inclusion," has now been released.

South Sudan - Overcoming Ethnic Conflicts: Education as an Instrument of Peace

(13-12-22) "We firmly believe in education as an instrument of peace. Even in South Sudan, to manage the transition from arms to dialogue, it is necessary to invest in schools, which is essential for the growth of a country battered by years of conflict", says the Italian Comboni missionary, Sister Laura Gemignani, who has been active in different African countries for more than 40 years.

The nun currently lives and works in Kanawat in the Diocese of Kotido in the Karamoja region, a 10-hour drive from Kampala. She has been working in South Sudan since July 2012 and has followed developments there at close range. During the years she spent in Yambio, a suffragan of the Archdiocese of Juba, she had come into contact with the residents, whom she describes as "quiet and peaceful people who belong to the Azande Kingdom and who, although politically not relevant, have always conveyed a sense of unity and cohesion". Also in order to overcome ethnic animosities and even identifying missionaries with 'enemy' tribes, many priests and the bishop, Eduardo Hiiboro Kussala, have been very committed to education in Yambio by opening schools that offer many children the opportunity to learn," reports the religious on the situation on site.

Vietnam - Caritas Vietnam: "Charity is our mission"

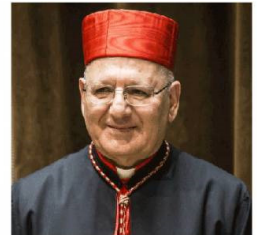
(13-12-22) In the parish of Phú Xuân, in Ho Chi Minh city, Father Dominic Ngô Quang Tuyên has always been committed to evangelization and charity. He sought gestures of concrete closeness and help to families in need and shelter for the homeless and consolation for young people in need, and education for children from poor families. The 74-year-old priest from Ho Chi Minh City was imprisoned under the communist regime for 13 years, underwent six heart surgeries and held many positions and translated Pope's messages. Today he is secretary of Caritas Vietnam. Recently Caritas Conference was held at Hai Phong: "All the baptized are called to a mission of charity towards the suffering and of spreading the Good News to all. This is God's mandate to us".

At the conference, Caritas Vietnam presented the projects carried out: emergency aid and repair of damaged houses after natural disasters and epidemics; protection and shelter for abandoned mothers and children; installation of drinking water systems in remote areas; Support for the poor and Covid-19 patients during the pandemic; Assistance, training and integration programs for HIV patients and the disabled; Providing scholarships to poor students and taking action to prevent human trafficking. These works "help spread the love of God in the Vietnamese community and society," emphasized Father Joseph Ngo Si Dinh, OP, the director of Caritas Vietnam.

Iraq - Chaldean Patriarchate: three days of "special fast" before Christmas, to ask for the gift of peace

(13-12-22) The Chaldean Patriarchate Louis Raphael Sako invites all baptized Chaldeans around the world in the days leading up to Christmas to a three-day fast for peace in Iraq and around the world.

The "special fast" is for peace on December 21, 22 and 23 and is intended to prepare the way for the joyful proclamation of the birth of Jesus.



Peru - Bishops after protests: 'We must calm tempers to protect our weak democracy'

The Peruvian "Defensoria del Pueblo" has reported that during the weekend demonstrations took place in several cities of the country to demand the closure of Parliament, the resignation of the new President Dina Boluarte and the return to power of Pedro Castillo, arrested and dismissed. A total of seven people have died in clashes between police and protesters. Three teenagers were among the victims.

On 13 December, the Peruvian Bishops' Conference published a communiqué on the "recent and painful episodes of violence" that have occurred in the country as a result of the political crisis. The bishops regret the deaths in the clashes between demonstrators and law enforcement officials and express their condolences to the families: "We urgently appeal," write the bishops, "to build bridges of dialogue, asking for serenity from all our compatriots who are protesting in various parts of the country". They give appropriate advice to the police, the Executive and members of the Congress.

Court lifts sanctions on Korean Christian TV

(13-12-22) A South Korean court lifted government sanctions on a Christian broadcaster over their on-air remarks on the proposed anti-discrimination law and same-sex issues during an interview in 2020.

Chief Judge Park Jeong-dae of the Seoul Administrative Court on Dec. 12 ruled in favour of Christian TV (CTS) and lifted the sanctions placed by the Korea Communications Commission (KCC), Yonhap news agency reported. Judge Park stated that the KCC sanctions against the broadcaster for negative remarks on LGBTQ rights in the proposed Anti-Discrimination Act during a July 2020 interview were not in the scope of the Broadcasting Act. "The plaintiff, a private operator, is operating the channel to educate Christian doctrine and missionary work," said Park.

He also added that the programme in question was a debate on the legal and social impact of the proposed law on Christianity which prohibits same-sex relations. Stating that the broadcaster operated a "religious channel," Judge Park ruled that the channel and its contents fall under the area of religious freedom protection.



Jesuit charity seeks Christmas gifts for Cambodia's poor

(13-12-22) A Jesuit-run charity in Australia has started a Christmas fundraiser to assist vulnerable families in Cambodia who are struggling amid poverty and hunger.

The Jesuit Mission Australia urged Catholics to shun traditional gifts this Christmas and instead support the Gifts for Change Program to provide a family in Cambodia with everything they need to start a chicken farm, to give them access to sustainable food and income.

"The chicken farm is a gift for tomorrow. Your support can empower

women, men, and children to live sustainably and ensure that food is on the table going forward," Helen Forde, CEO of Jesuit Mission Australia, said in a press release on Dec. 13.

The chicken farm is one part of a community development program to assist farmers in remote areas to gain knowledge and skills.

Japan confronts problem of video game addiction

(13-12-22) From Super Mario to Final Fantasy, Japan has long been synonymous with gaming, but some experts and parents fear a growing addiction problem is going unaddressed.

While nearby nations like China and South Korea have imposed drastic restrictions on youth gaming in recent years -- with mixed results -- some Japanese families feel they are being left to deal with the issue on their own.

Each month, a group meets in Tokyo to swap stories and strategies for tackling their children's gaming habits. "My only comfort is that he has been keeping his promise to stay offline overnight," one father says, as another confides their child has been attending a rehab day camp.

The group's founder, Sakiko Kuroda, says children in Japan now start playing video games early in primary school, and pandemic restrictions mean many are playing for longer. Many parents do not know how to deal with the issue, and there is "a lack of action by the government and the gaming industry," said Kuroda, who started the group in 2019 as an informal meet-up. Japanese education ministry survey shows that 17 percent of children aged six to 12 spend over four hours a day gaming.

14-12-22

Cardinal Ouellet sues woman who accused him of sexual assault

(14-12-22) Cardinal Marc Ouellet, Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops since 2010, was accused in a Canadian lawsuit of sexual assault. Pope Francis determined "there are insufficient elements to open a canonical investigation," a Vatican spokesman said.

Cardinal Ouellet has now sued his accuser in Quebec for defamation and is seeking \$100,000 in damages. He pledged to donate any court award to "the fight against the sexual abuse of the Indigenous peoples of Canada."

Beware 'polite demons,' Pope tells audience

(14-12-22) At his weekly public audience on December 14, Pope Francis continued his series of catechetical talks on discernment, speaking about the need for vigilance in the spiritual life. Here below is the summary of the Pope's talk.

In our catechesis on discernment, we have considered its various elements, including prayer, self-knowledge, spiritual experience and the signs assuring us of the rightness of our decisions. A fundamental attitude that must guide the entire process of discernment, however, is that of *vigilance*. Jesus often warns his disciples of the need to be watchful, lest the enemy take advantage of our distraction and bring our good efforts to nought. The Lord gives the example of an unclean spirit who, chased from a house, returns to find it clean but empty, since its owner is absent, and then comes back with seven of his companions. Like that owner, we too can fail to guard our house and keep our

hearts pure as a dwelling for the Lord. When we trust excessively in ourselves and not in the Lord's grace, our presumption can open a door to the evil one and can find ourselves "worse than before" (cf. *Lk* 12:45). In our exercise of discernment, may we always remain vigilant, for vigilance is a sign of spiritual wisdom and of the humility that is at the heart of the Christian life.

Pope suggests modest Christmas celebrations, solidarity with Ukraine

(14-12-22) As he concluded his public audience on December 14, Pope Francis asked the world's Christians to "renew our closeness to the battered Ukrainian people."

The Pontiff suggested that the faithful celebrate Christmas "with the people of Ukraine in our hearts." He added that it would be appropriate to cut back on expensive gifts and celebrations, and to "offer concrete signs of help for them."

Nicaraguan bishop to remain under house arrest

(14-12-22) Bishop Rolando Alvarez of Matagalpa, Nicaragua, must remain under house arrest, pending his trial on charges of conspiracy against the Ortega regime, the government has announced. Bishop Alvarez was arrested in August. His trial—on "damaging the Nicaraguan government and society"—will open on January 10.

Cardinal Zen appeals verdict; new Jimmy Lai trial postponed to 2023

(14-12-22) Cardinal Joseph Zen and four co-defendants have appealed the verdict of a Hong Kong court that found them guilty of failing to register a charity that provided support for democracy activists.

And in a related development, publisher and democracy advocate Jimmy Lai, who was recently sentenced last week to a 5-year prison term on one criminal charge, had been informed that his trial on more serious charges of conspiracy against the Chinese government will be postponed until 2023. The long delay is due to the Chinese government's refusal to extend a visa for Lai's lawyer, who is British; the government has said that the lawyer represents a risk to national security.



Cardinal Parolin: Europe must recover the 'spirit of Helsinki'

(14-12-22) Reflecting on the war in Ukraine, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Holy See's Secretary of State, referred to the 1975 Helsinki Accords, in which the Soviet Union pledged respect for human rights in return for a recognition of post-World War II Soviet gains in Eastern Europe.

The prelate's reference to the Helsinki Accords could be interpreted as a simple call to negotiate an end to the war in Ukraine—or as a subtle call to the international community to be willing to recognize Russian gains in Ukraine in return for peace.

"It is terrifying that there is talk of nuclear devices and atomic warfare as a possibility," Cardinal Parolin warned. "The accelerated arms race is worrying, with huge investments of money used for war rather than to fight hunger, create jobs, ensure adequate medical care for people who have never had it."

'Orwellian': Vatican prosecutor reopens criminal investigation into former auditor

(14-12-22) In November, the Vatican's former Auditor General, Libero Milone, and his former deputy, Ferruccio Panicco, filed an unjust dismissal suit against the Secretariat of State.

Milone said that "his attempts to clear his name in the Vatican have run up against 'Orwellian' obstacles to justice and transparency — including the decision by Vatican prosecutors to reopen a criminal investigation into Milone in apparent retaliation for his filing suit for wrongful dismissal," according to the report.

The Pillar's report examines the current status of Milone's suit and the Vatican prosecutor's investigation.

In Vatican newspaper, academic urges Pope Francis to 'get beyond' Petrine-Marian distinction

(14-12-22) Drawing on a distinction made by the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, Pope Francis recently said, "Why can a woman not enter ordained ministry? It is because the Petrine principle has no place for that. Yes, one has to be in the Marian principle, which is more important." In an article in the Vatican newspaper, Marinella Perroni, a retired professor of biblical theology, responded, "Doesn't the Marian-Petrine principle express an ideology and rhetoric of sexual and gender differentiation that has now been exposed as one of the covers for patriarchal privileges?"

Holy Land's Catholic leaders lament political rhetoric, rising violence

(14-12-22) As Benjamin Netanyahu forms a new Israeli government, the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land has expressed concern about "the political context in which this government is being formed and about the gradual deterioration of the general social and political situation in the Holy Land."

"Certain statements made by members who are part of the governmental coalition are very divisive toward the Arab or otherwise non-Jewish community" and "lay the groundwork for further violence," the bishops warned.

"The living area available to the Palestinian population continues to shrink, due to the sustained growth of settlements," the bishops added. "We are also witnessing attacks to the Jewish population. Violence is never justified and must always be condemned, no matter where it comes from."

On December 13th, 2022 they launched two new offices: the Safeguarding Office & the Professional Legal Office, which aim to provide support and advice to the Catholic Church in the Holy Land.

Malawi government draws battle lines against bishops' conference

(14-12-22) The southeastern African nation of 20.3 million is 80% Christian (32% Catholic), 14% Muslim, and 5% ethnic religionist.

4 statues vandalized outside of Pennsylvania church

(14-12-22) Since May 2020, there have been at least 182 acts of vandalism, arson, and other destruction at parishes and other Catholic sites in the United States.

DR Congo - Hundreds of dead, wounded and missing, serious damage to buildings: floods in the capital of the country that is preparing to welcome the Pope

(14-12-22) Twenty-four neighborhoods of Kinshasa, where some 12 million people live out of a total population of more than 17 million, have suffered serious damage due to the movements of earth caused by the floods that hit the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the night of December 12-13. The death toll remains provisional, but many children have undoubtedly lost their lives in the collapse of several houses in the Binza Delvaux neighborhood of Ngaliema. The local Church has expressed its condolences over the incident. For his part, the Bishop of Kisantu, Crispin Kimbeni, addressing the deanery of Kimwenza -located in Kinshasa but belonging to the diocese of Kisantu-, urged everyone to offer maximum solidarity to those in need of help.

Bishop Kimbeni underlines the cooperation between the Church and the Government with a view to the papal visit. "In the diocese of Kisantu," says Kimbeni, "we are making fruitful progress. Numerous priests will be present at the various ceremonies organized. Among them, the mass on February 1 in Ndolo, the prayer meeting that will take place on the afternoon of February 2 in the Kinshasa cathedral." He underlines the cooperation between the Church and the Government with a view to the papal visit.

Malaysia urged not to deport Myanmar nationals

(14-12-22) Rights groups have urged Malaysian authorities to stop deporting Myanmar nationals whose lives are at most risk amid the violent and dangerous situation in the military-ruled Southeast Asian nation.

The appeal came after a Malaysian court lifted a stay on the deportation of 114 Myanmar nationals including children on Dec. 13. It remains unclear when the 114 Myanmar nationals would be deported.

Amnesty International and Access Asylum Malaysia have called for a halt to the expulsion of Myanmar nationals to a dangerous situation and respect for human rights and international law.

Thai Church to care for interfaith families, sexual minorities

(14-12-22) The Catholic Church in Thailand needs to plan better to offer pastoral care to increasing inter-faith couples and sexual minorities in the Buddhist-majority nation, says a report on the Church's synodal consultations.

The national report, a synthesis of reports from two archdioceses and nine dioceses, acknowledged that marriage between Buddhists and Catholics has become common in Thailand, where Christians form just 1 percent of the nation's 70 million mostly Buddhist people. In Thailand, "many Catholic families are married with disparity of cult," the synod report said using a canonical expression used for a baptized Catholic marrying a non-baptized person in the Church without both changing religions. The situation demands better pastoral care of family life and ongoing formation "to instill faith, devotion and understanding of the roles and duties, strengthening the relationships and the unity in the family," the report said while explaining the general need of the Church.

"In addition, the increasing phenomenon of same-sex Christian couples reminds the Catholic Church in Thailand of the necessity to provide appropriate pastoral care for them," the report said about another need.

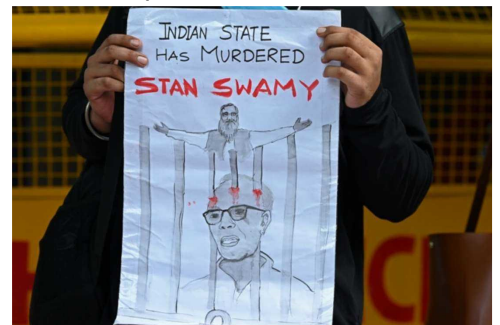
Indian govt must come clean on Fr Stan Swamy's death

(14-12-22) Catholic activists and priests want the Indian government to "take full responsibility" for the custodial death of Jesuit Father Stan Swamy after latest findings by US-based digital forensic experts that false evidence was planted on the priest's computer by hacking it.

Arsenal Consulting, a Massachusetts-based digital forensics firm (US), in a recent report, said the "digital evidence used to arrest senior human rights defender Father Swamy in the Bhima-Koregaon case was planted on his computer's hard drive."

The 84-year-old Jesuit, a rights activist based in eastern Jharkhand state, died as an undertrial in Mumbai on July 5 last year after being denied bail on medical grounds despite suffering from multiple age-related ailments. He was arrested on Oct. 8, 2020, by India's anti-terror National Investigation Agency (NIA) and accused of being party to a conspiracy allegedly hatched by outlawed Maoist rebels to unleash mob violence at Bhima-Koregaon in the western state of Maharashtra on Jan. 1, 2018. Arsenal said "the attacker responsible for compromising Father Swamy's computer had extensive resources [including time] and it is obvious that the primary goals were surveillance and incriminating document delivery."

Disclosing details of the findings, Father Joseph Xavier, a Jesuit colleague of the late priest, said in a statement that the hackers "first attacked Father Swamy's computer on Oct. 19, 2014, using a Remote Access Trojan (RAT) called Netwire." "The report [by Arsenal] shows examples of the hackers being able to read his passwords as he was typing them, as well as other documents and emails," said Father Xavier, who is also a convener of the Father Stan Swamy Legacy Committee of the Jesuits. The hacker also read as many as 24,000 files on Father Stan's device and planted files between July 2017 and June 2019, the priest said quoting from the report.



“Over 50 files were created on Father Swamy’s hard drive, including incriminating documents that fabricated links between Father Stan and the Maoist insurgency. The final incriminating document was planted on Father Stan’s computer on June 5, 2019, a week before the raid on him,” he added. It was on the basis of these planted documents that Father Swamy was first arrested in spite of experts raising serious doubts about the authenticity of the documents, Father Xavier added. Father Xavier, in the statement, said Arsenal has effectively caught the attacker red-handed, based on remnants of their activity left behind in file system transactions, application execution data, and otherwise. However, it has not disclosed details of the hackers, who are believed to be connected with the state, he added. The statement further alleged that multiple findings link the suspected hackers to the Indian state.

Jesuit Father A. Santhanam, the national convener of the National Lawyers Forum of Religious and Priests, said it had been proved that “Father Swamy was falsely implicated by the investigating agency by implanting fabricated evidence.” He wondered if the federal government will expose its own agencies involved in the case, but said the world has the right to know who hacked the computer of Father Swamy. He said the government must also take full responsibility and compensate for the loss of life, besides releasing all those accused and imprisoned in the Bhima-Koregaon case.



Indian archdiocese calls for simple, meaningful Christmas

(14-12-22) Ranchi archdiocese in the eastern Indian state of Jharkhand has urged Catholics to prepare for a simple and meaningful Christmas and embrace charity amid ongoing misery brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In this year’s Advent and Christmas pastoral letter, the archdiocese urged Catholics to celebrate the birth of Jesus by serving those in need rather than drawing up shopping lists.

“This is the first Christmas celebration after Covid-19 which had brought untold misery and hardship for the common man. Many people may take this as a great opportunity to celebrate amid such difficult times and we are not against that, but also asking people to help the poor and needy,” Auxiliary Bishop Theodore Mascarenhas of Ranchi told UCA News on Dec. 13.

He said the Archdiocese of Ranchi and Daltonganj diocese will distribute blankets and education kits to more than 1,000 poor families and children during this Christmas season.

15-12-22

Pope welcomes new ambassadors to the Holy See

(15-12-22) Pope Francis lamented “violations of international law and what I have called a Third World War being fought piecemeal,” as he welcomed several new ambassadors to the Holy See on December 15.

In his prepared remarks to the new envoys—from the Bahamas, Belize, Mongolia, Niger, Norway, Sudan, Thailand, and Uganda—the Pope underlined the importance of diplomatic work, “especially in these days marked by the continued problems associated with the global health crisis and by the entrenched violent conflicts around the world.”

Archbishop Paglia used charity funds to renovate apartment

(15-12-22) Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia “diverted hundreds of thousands of euros allocated to support missionary and charitable works while he served as president of the Pontifical Council for the Family,” according to the report.

The archbishop is currently President of the Pontifical Academy for Life and Grand Chancellor of the John Paul II Pontifical Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences.

Russia says Pope apologized for criticism on Ukraine

(15-12-22) Russian's foreign ministry has said that the Vatican apologized for remarks that Pope Francis made, accusing Russian troops of cruelty during the war in Ukraine.

Russian government spokesman had strongly objected to the Pope's remark—made in an interview with *America* magazine—that he had received “much information about the cruelty of troops” in Ukraine. The Pope had gone on to say that the ethnic minority groups were responsible for the cruelty, saying: “generally, the cruelest are perhaps those who are of Russia but are not of the Russian tradition, such as the Chechens, the Buryats, and so on.”

The Russian foreign ministry said that, having received a Vatican apology, the subject was now closed. Vatican press office confirmed this news.

Nicaraguan bishop charged with conspiracy against government

(15-12-22) Bishop Rolando Alvarez of Matagalpa, Nicaragua, appeared in court on December 15 to face charges of conspiracy against the country's government.

Bishop Alvarez, who has been under house arrest since August, has been a vocal critic of the Ortega regime, which has adopted a hostile attitude toward the Catholic hierarchy. The bishop was not allowed to wear his clerical collar in court.



Look at others, not at cell phones, Pope urges Italian youth

(15-12-22) Pope Francis encouraged young Italian Catholics to reach out to others, because “God doesn't like it when we stay lazy on the couch,” at a December 15 meeting with members of Catholic Action.

The Pope spoke with concern about young people who withdraw from others, spending their time looking at their cell phones. “Our eyes are made to look at each other,” he said.

Journalists contradict allegations of ‘cover up’ against John Paul II before he was Pope

(15-12-22) A Dutch journalist has charged that he has found “concrete cases of priests abusing children in the Archdiocese of Krakow, where the future Pope was archbishop. The future Pope knew about it and transferred them anyway, which led to new victims.”

Polish journalists Tomasz Krzyzak and Piotr Litka, however, have countered the Dutch journalist's claims. They state that the future Pope “did not cover up any abuse and consistently acted against such cases during his time as archbishop of Krakow from 1964 to 1978.”

Crisis of confidence over cardinal shakes Cologne Catholics

(15-12-22) German prosecutors are investigating whether Cardinal Rainer Woelki of Cologne made a false statement under oath about his knowledge of sexual abuse in the archdiocese.

Cardinal Woelki has twice offered his resignation to the Pontiff; the Vatican has cleared him of canonical charges.

Jerusalem bishop assesses situation of Christians there

(15-12-22) “The exodus of Christians has been going on for more than a century, for the same political, economic, and social reasons,” said Auxiliary Bishop William Shomali. “But despite that we are not falling into pessimism.”

“Although the percentage of Christians is falling, the overall number is increasing,” he explained. “In Israel and Palestine, there were only about 21,500 Christians in 1848, which represented 10% of the population of the whole of historic Palestine. Now we are less than 2%, but the number of Christians is more than 230,000, not counting foreign workers.”

Sudan - Campaign to fight drugs: substance abuse as early as the age of 12

(15-12-22) An unprecedented increase in crime related to drug addiction in the Kassala region has been denounced by the Head of the Department of the National Campaign against Drugs (NCCD). The phenomenon is particularly widespread among young people. According to a statement by the NCCD, the entire population in the border region is affected, since criminal phenomena mainly spread within families. The NCCD office is organizing a campaign to raise awareness among young people about the dangers of drug use in cooperation with the Kassala government, military and police forces and UN agencies.

Philippines - Christmas, a time to listen, dialogue, walk together, pray with "Simbang Gabi"



(15-12-22) At Christmas "God walks with us" with his people and the Feast of the Incarnation is a "promemoria for synodality" and reminds "God's presence with us and his journey with us". This was emphasized by the Chairman of the Philippine Bishops' Conference, Bishop Pablo Virgilio David of Kalookan, at the opening of the traditional "Christmas Novena," "Simbang Gabi," which was celebrated nationwide by the Filipino faithful with a mass in the early hours of the morning before going to the church. "Christmas is really about God coming to us and accompanying us

on our life journey so that we learn to walk and love one another," he said.

The theme of the "journey together" is at the heart of the novena with which all Filipino congregations are preparing for Christmas 2022, taking the opportunity to "strengthen communion within the church and participation in mission: our dream is a missionary church in every word, thought and gesture," he said.

Haiti - Foyer Saint Camille in Porte au Prince remains open and operational

(15-12-22) Father Robert Daudier, Director of the Hospital, reports on the recent initiatives of the Foyer Saint Camille Hospital in Port au Prince. It recently celebrated the International Day of Children with Disabilities, while the emergency caused by the violence of armed gangs has "brought several Haitian hospitals to their knees and forced them to close" and the country is facing "an increase in cases of cholera".

However, the Foyer Saint Camille hospital remained open and operational. "Many pregnant women were taken in to give them the opportunity to deliver their babies safely," continues Father Daudier.

Dominican Republic - "Christmas is often no longer called by its name"

(15-12-22) In his Christmas message, the President of the Bishops' Conference of the Dominican Republic, Archbishop Freddy Breton of Santiago de los Caballeros, laments that "Christmas is no longer called by name because it smells like Christ. Now they say 'Happy Holidays', which can be anything. However, the archbishop is convinced that the spirit of Christmas is not dead, "but the commercial aspects are making more noise and getting better press".

"There are still many people - continues Archbishop Breton - who, like the humble shepherds of Bethlehem, rejoice at the newborn child in the poverty of a manger." He therefore calls for preserving the authentic values of the Dominican people, which also includes the true spirit of Christmas.

Nigeria - Six months after the massacre of the Saint-François-Xavier church in Owo, questions are being asked about who committed it

(15-12-22) More than six months after the June 5 massacre at St. Francis Xavier Church in Owo, Ondo State, Nigerians are waiting for the holding a trial against those arrested for their participation in the massacre (which left 40 dead and 80 injured).

On August 9, the Nigerian army announced the arrest of four people accused of the massacre at the Catholic Church. The announcement was made to the media by the Nigerian Army Chief of Staff, General Lucky Irabor, that the arrests took place on August 1. Two other people were arrested a few

days later. "General Irabor, Nigeria is still waiting", Bishop Felix Femi Ajakaye, Bishop of Ekiti, a neighboring diocese of Ondo, said in a statement asking for an update on the investigation and progress in the prosecution of the accused.

Silent Christmas for Christians in war-torn Myanmar

(15-12-22) A Christmas of darkness, silence and fear awaits thousands of Christians in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Myanmar, where carols, decorations and illuminations are banned because of ongoing conflicts.

The sounds of gunfire, fighter jets and artillery shelling have replaced those of carols and celebrations in predominantly Christian Kachin, Kayah, Karen and Chin states. Away from home-sweet-home, thousands of Christians have been forced to take refuge in churches, makeshift camps and in forests following military attacks against civilians.

At least 170,000 civilians in Kayah state — more than half of its population of 300,000 — have been forced to abandon their homes, according to the Karenni Civil Society Network. At least nine Catholic churches have been hit by artillery shelling and air strikes by Myanmar's military in Loikaw diocese, with 16 out of 38 parishes severely affected by the conflict which has intensified since the junta ousted Myanmar's elected government in a coup on Feb. 1 last year.

The dioceses of Loikaw, Pekhon, Hakha, Kalay and Mandalay have been badly hit following the military coup that triggered peaceful demonstrations and growing resistance from newly emerged militia groups.

Archbishop Marco Tin Win of Mandalay archdiocese that covers the Sagaing region where hundreds of homes in three historic Catholic villages were torched by junta forces, appealed to Catholics to focus on spiritual preparations and avoid "high-profile celebrations" at Christmas and New Year to show solidarity with people affected by the conflict.

Christians in Kayah, Shan and Chin states could not hold Christmas and New Year celebrations last year due to the fighting. More than 1.4 million people are displaced across the country, with more than 1.1 million displaced since the 2021 military takeover, according to a UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs report on Dec. 3.

Bombs found, defused at churches in the Philippines

(15-12-22) Philippine military experts have disposed of three homemade bombs found on the premises of two Catholic churches in Jolo town, Sulu province in Mindanao region.

The bombs, suspected to have been planted by the terrorist group, Abu Sayyaf, were spotted on Dec. 15 on the patio of San Roque and San Isidro parishes in Jolo town, which has been the target of suicide bombings in recent years.

The military experts were informed by policemen on patrol duty after an alert was sounded by the locals.

Indian bishops hail move to assist interfaith couples

(15-12-22) Catholic bishops have welcomed a decision by an Indian provincial government to monitor couples in interfaith and inter-caste marriages, calling it a "good initiative and a good mission" to reach out to women in distress. The initiative by the government in the western Indian state of Maharashtra also proposes to be in touch with the estranged families of women who marry outside their faith or caste.

"It's a good move to reach out to distressed women, who get into great difficulties due to such marriages," Archbishop Elias Gonsalves of Nagpur and the Apostolic Administrator of Amravati in Maharashtra told UCA News.



Maharashtra's Minister for Women and Child Development, Mangal Prabhat Lodha, said the government aims to help families reconcile and avoid tragedies like women being harmed or even getting killed by their partners. The reference was to the recent case of Shraddha Walkar, a 27-year-old Hindu woman, who was murdered by her live-in partner, Aaftab Poonawala, a 29-year-old Muslim, in the capital Delhi in May this year. Walkar's family was against the relationship and had cut off links with her.



HK police wrong to ban Tiananmen vigil, court rules

(15-12-22) Hong Kong police's decision to ban a Tiananmen vigil last year was unlawful, a court ruled on 14 December, as it overturned the conviction of jailed democracy activist Chow Hang-tung.

The ruling is a rare rebuke of authorities in a city where the public commemoration of Beijing's deadly 1989 crackdown has been virtually wiped out in recent years.

Chow, a 37-year-old lawyer and prominent democracy activist, led a now-disbanded group that used to organise the city's annual candlelight vigils to mourn those killed in Tiananmen Square when China sent troops to crush democracy protests.

16-12-22

Pope links fight against Covid, quest for peace, in message for World Day of Peace

(16-12-22) In his annual message for the 56th World Day of Peace, which will be celebrated on January 1, Pope Francis makes an unusual connection between the worldwide battle against Covid and the quest for peace. The title of the papal message is: "No one can be saved alone. Combatting Covid-19 together, embarking together on paths of peace."

In his message the Pontiff says that "when challenges seem to overwhelm our lives, we are called to keep our hearts open to hope and to trust in God, who makes himself present, accompanies us with tenderness, sustains us in our weariness and, above all, guides our path." He argues that the Covid epidemic "exposed any number of forms of fragility," and yet the crisis provided an opportunity to learn and grow together.

However, as the epidemic eased, the Pope writes, "a terrible new disaster befell humanity." He refers to the war in Ukraine, "reaping innocent victims and spreading insecurity, not only among those directly affected, but in a widespread and indiscriminate way for everyone..." The war, the Pope says, "represents a setback for the whole of humanity and not merely for the parties directly involved."

Doubling down on his support for the Covid vaccine, he remarks: "While a vaccine has been found for Covid-19, suitable solutions have not yet been found for the war."

Returning to the discussion of the Covid epidemic, the Pope calls upon the world's leaders to "revisit the issue of ensuring public health for all." At the same time he calls for "actions that promote peace and put an end to the conflicts and wars that continue to spawn poverty and death."

Pope praises firefighters' service, dedication

(16-12-22) "Dear friends, Christmas, now close, is the feast that more than any other sums up the value I have proposed to you: proximity, compassion, tenderness, solidarity, service, brotherhood," Pope Francis said in an address to firefighters and their families. "And all this was revealed not in writing, in a codex to be observed, but written in the flesh of a Son of man, Jesus."

Live a life of prayer and thanksgiving, Pope tells seminarians

(16-12-22) "Remember that, when you become priests, your first obligation will be a life of prayer born of gratitude for that love of predilection which God showed you in calling you to his service," Pope Francis said in an address to seminarians from the Conciliar Seminary of Barcelona. "This is the first joyful mystery from which everything is born."

Priest decries lack of religious freedom in Cuba

(16-12-22) Father Alberto Reyes, a priest of the Archdiocese of Camagüey (Cuba), has publicly criticized the nation's Office of Religious Affairs for exercising strict control over Catholic life. "If in my land there were religious freedom," he said, "the churches would have access to social media, and we could offer our radio and television programs, to make known through them the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which we consider the best programme of life that exists."

Bethlehem welcomes Christmas tourists after pandemic lull

(16-12-22) 120,000 pilgrims and tourists are expected to visit Bethlehem during the week of Christmas—down from 150,000 in 2019, but up from the previous years of the pandemic.

Malawi - After suspicion of human trafficking: Five seriously injured in explosion in Dzaleka refugee camp

(16-12-22) On the evening of December 14, five refugees were injured when a hand grenade exploded in the main market of the Dzaleka reception centre in central Malawi, about 30 km from the capital Lilongwe. The police meanwhile arrested a Rwandan refugee who is suspected of having detonated the explosive device on purpose. The three seriously injured, including a leader of the Burundian refugees, are being treated at nearby Dowa District Hospital. The Dzaleka refugee camp, which opened in 1994, was originally intended to accommodate around 12,000 refugees. Today it accommodates more than 50,000 people, most of them from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the rest from Burundi, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Somalia. It has faced allegations of human trafficking and child abuse.

Mali - Sahel region: propaganda war between jihadist extremists

(16-12-22) In a propaganda war, the jihadist extremist groups GSIM (also known by their Arabic acronym JNIM) and EIGS (also known as IS Sahel) operating in Mali claim through their respective social media to have inflicted heavy casualties on their opponent. GSIM reports killing at least 40 EIGS men and shows drone footage video showing the bodies of killed opponents and numerous weapons allegedly captured by the rival group. The EIGS, on the other hand, claims to have killed 100 GSIM fighters in the Ménaka region, which is even closer to the border triangle and controlled by the local Islamic State affiliate.

Lebanon - Unprecedented summit between the Patriarchs of the Churches of Syriac tradition

(16-12-22) An unprecedented and in some respects historic meeting between the leaders of the Churches of the Syriac tradition, to discuss and reflect together on the emergencies and problems faced by Christian communities in the Middle East, in the light of the common spiritual heritage and of the teaching of the Fathers of the Church. This is the only ecclesial meeting convened on Friday, December 16, at Atchaneh (Lebanon), at the headquarters of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate. The meeting, convened by the Syriac-Orthodox Patriarch Mar Ignatius Aphrem II, sees the participation, among others, of the Syriac-Catholic Patriarch Ignace Youssif III Younan, the Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros Raï, the Assyrian Patriarch Mar Awa III and the Chaldean Patriarch Luis Raphael Sako.



Myanmar - Escalation of civil conflict, restrictions on humanitarian aid and accommodation in Buddhist monasteries

(16-12-22) From 1 February 1, 2021 to December 14, 2022, in 2,130 days of civil conflict in Myanmar, the clashes, which also included 232 air raids carried out by the Myanmar army, produced a total of 1.132 million people displaced within the Burmese population, in different states and among

different ethnic groups. Fifty-eight meetings were organised, in different places and with different interlocutors, to negotiate a ceasefire or the opening of negotiations, without much result. Among the measures taken to suppress any possible help to the popular forces, the junta of Myanmar has prohibited Buddhist monasteries in the Yangon region from accepting overnight guests, unless authorized by the military authorities. Meanwhile, the travel ban on national and international NGOs continues, despite the ceasefire reached in Rakhine State on 26 November. Here, the army has been preventing humanitarian aid to displaced people for more than six months.



Peru - Day of prayer for peace, while the number of deaths in street protests increases

(16-12-22) Given the serious situation of pain and violence suffered by the Peruvian people due to the current political crisis, the Episcopal Conference invites "all the faithful and people of good will to express peace, hope and fraternity in Peru, through a Day of Prayer for Peace, next Sunday, December 18. This initiative will be carried out in all the dioceses of the

country, organized by each bishop in his ecclesiastical jurisdiction". The initiative of the Bishops proposes that the families that participate in the Day display a symbol of peace (white flag or white handkerchief) in their homes and institutions, from now on.

Indian clergy still face charges over anti-port protest

(16-12-22) Hopes that bishops and priests in the Latin Archdiocese of Trivandrum in India's southern Kerala district could avoid criminal charges stemming from a 140-day fishermen's anti-port protest have been dashed despite the protest having been called off.

"We will deal with it legally. None of us did anything illegal by supporting the genuine cause of the fishermen," Father Michael Thomas, one of the conveners of the protest, told UCA News on Dec. 16. Police have registered 168 cases against close to 50 Catholic clergies including Archbishop Thomas J Netto and Auxiliary Bishop Christudas Rajappan after the protest against the multi-billion dollar Adani Vizhinjam Port on the Arabian Sea coast in Thiruvananthapuram district turned violent in the last week of November.

Caritas Bangladesh warns Rohingya over risky sea journeys

(16-12-22) Church charity Caritas Bangladesh has launched an awareness campaign among Rohingya refugees to deter them from risking their lives by fleeing Bangladesh and Myanmar on risky sea journeys run by trafficking gangs.

"Caritas Bangladesh is running an awareness program for about 23,000 Rohingya people to prevent them from traveling illegally by sea," said Marcel Ratan Guda, director of the charity's emergency response program. Volunteers will make door-to-door visits and hold discussions with community leaders in refugee camps to explain the dangers that people face by making perilous sea journeys, he said.

US rights watchdog says police brutality rife in Philippines

(16-12-22) A US human rights group has said that physical abuse of suspects by the police was a common procedure in the Philippines.

Cases of police brutality have not reached courts of law because victims thought they had no chance to take on the police force, New York-based rights watchdog Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in a report.

"Police brutality is common in the Philippines, where police officers commit serious abuses against criminal suspects with impunity," the watchdog said in a statement on Dec. 16.

HRW traced police supremacy over civilians during the time of former President Rodrigo Duterte when thousands of police officers were allegedly linked to the killing of 30,000 drug suspects.

17-12-22

Ethiopia - Adigrat overwhelmed by more than 100,000 new displaced persons

(17-12-22) "Our city is overwhelmed by a multitude of newly displaced people who have arrived from the border areas. More than 100,000 people live in the city and in the nearby villages, counting only on the help of other families. Each family is taking care of five or six other families". This was announced by Bishop Tesfaselassie Medhin, head of the Catholic Eparchy of Adigrat, raising the alarm about the situation.

The scenario described by the Bishop, and relaunched by him through local media such as Tigray television, shows how the peace agreements signed on November 2 in Pretoria to put an end to the bloody two-year conflict in the northern areas of Ethiopia have not canceled the dramatic effects of that war on the daily life of the population.

America - Ministry of the "missionary" Catechist: criteria and formation itineraries of Episcopal Conferences

(17-12-22) "May the institution of the ministry of the catechist be, for the Church, a further reason for unity and communion, in the diversity of gifts and ministries that are at the service of the ecclesial community, for its maturation and growth": this is stated in the Document just published by the Brazilian Church which indicates "criteria and itineraries for the institution of the ministry of the catechist".

The Biblical-Catechetical Animation Commission of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB), following the indications of Pope Francis in the Apostolic Letter *Antiquum ministerium*, which institutes this ministry and assigns to the Episcopal Conferences the task of indicating the criteria and the formative itinerary, has prepared this Document that presents considerations and criteria that must be put into practice in the local Churches of Brazil.



Pope: 'My resignation letter is ready in case of health problems'

(17-12-22) In an interview with the Spanish daily ABC, Pope Francis revealed that at the beginning of his pontificate he gave the then-Secretary of State, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, a letter declaring that he would step down in the event of serious and permanent health impediments that made it impossible for him to exercise his role as Bishop of Rome and pastor of the universal Church.

18-12-22

Pope at Angelus: 'God can turn a crisis into a new horizon'

(18-12-22) Pope Francis prayed the noon-day Angelus with pilgrims in a sunny St. Peter's Square on Sunday, reflecting on the day's Gospel (Mt 1:18-24).

Focusing his remarks on the example of St. Joseph, the Pope noted that the man who would become Jesus' foster father is shocked to discover that Mary was expecting a child that was not his. But being a good man, he chose "the way of mercy" in dealing with her and planned to secretly annul their engagement, as the law permitted. "God shines a new light in his heart" said the Pope and St. Joseph understood that God was fulfilling in him—albeit in an unexpected way—the greatest dream of every devout Israelite: to be the father of the Messiah.

Pope Francis went on to say that St. Joseph knew he would have to entrust himself to God completely by welcoming Mary and her Son in a way that was different from anything that had been done before. The "just man" displayed heroic courage and said "yes" to God, trusting Him completely and asking for no further guarantees.

The lesson we learn from Joseph is "We need to attentively welcome surprises in life, even crises," for "God's horizons are surprisingly, but infinitely more grand and beautiful than ours," concluded the Pope.

Pope Francis prays for children suffering in Ukraine, expresses concern over South Caucasus' situation

(18-12-22) The Pontiff recalled Ukraine who will be unable to Christ in peace and security. assisted by the Vatican's "Santa Dispensary, as well as their staff at Paul VI audience hall on everyone to pray for peace in forget the children of Ukraine,"



the many children of celebrate the birth of Meeting children Marta" Pediatric parents and volunteer Sunday, he urged Ukraine. "We must not he said. "So many

children are suffering from war, and in other parts of the world they also suffer from injustice." Pope Francis expressed concern for the humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, after Armenia accuses Azerbaijan of sealing off the Lachin Corridor. Around 120,000 Armenians, including 30,000 children, live in the enclave, and the alleged road closure has isolated them from the world and deprived them of food, medicine, and basic necessities.

"God opens crises into new horizons, perhaps not as we would expect, but in the way that He knows how. God's horizons are surprising, but infinitely more grand and beautiful than ours!" (Pope Francis on IV Sunday of Advent)

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