

CATHOLIC WORLD LAST WEEK

(CWLW)

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13-3-23

Women's ordination, transgender ideology move forward at German Synodal Way

(13-3-23) After the German Synodal Path approved same-sex blessings, the mixed body of laity and prelates approved documents on "Dealing with gender diversity" and "Women in sacramental ministry: Perspectives for the universal Church dialogue."

96% of participants approved the document on gender diversity, which calls for the ordination of the transgendered. Among the bishops present, the vote was 38-7 in favor, with 12 abstentions.

Likewise, only 10 bishops voted against the document calling for the ordination of women to the diaconate.

Pope Francis: Gender ideology is 'one of the most dangerous ideological colonizations' today



(13-3-23) "Gender ideology, today, is one of the most dangerous ideological colonizations," Pope Francis said in a recent interview with Elisabetta Piqué of *La Nación*. "Why is it dangerous? Because it blurs differences and the value of men and women."

"All humanity is the tension of differences. It is to grow through the tension of differences," he continued. "The question of gender is diluting the differences and making the world the same, all dull, all alike, and that is contrary to the human vocation."

Nicaragua suspends Vatican ties after Pope says Ortega regime recalls Nazis, Communists

(13-3-23) In a recent interview with the Argentine website *Infobae*, Pope Francis spoke about the 26-year prison sentence for Nicaraguan Bishop Rolando Álvarez.

"It is something out of line with reality; it is as if we were bringing back the Communist dictatorship of 1917 or the Hitler dictatorship of 1935," the Pope said. "They are a type of vulgar dictatorships ... With much respect, I have no choice but to think that the person who leads [Daniel Ortega] is unstable."

In response, the Nicaraguan government has closed its embassy at the Vatican, as well as the Vatican embassy in Nicaragua, Reuters reported.

In new interviews, Pope Francis discusses celibacy, war, and his 10 years

(13-3-23) In a flurry of interviews timed for the 10th anniversary of his election, Pope Francis discussed priestly celibacy, the hatred of warfare, and his record as Pontiff.

In conversation with an Argentine journalist, the Pope said that "there is no contradiction for a priest to marry. Celibacy in the Western Church is a temporary prescription: I do not know if it is settled in one way or another, but it is temporary in this sense." Asked whether the discipline of clerical celibacy could be reviewed, the Pope said, "Yes, yes. In fact, everyone in the Eastern Church is married. Or those who want to. There they make a choice. Before ordination there is the choice to marry or to be celibate." At the same time, the Pontiff said that he did not think that the ordination of married men to the priesthood would lead to a rise in priestly vocations.

The Pontiff declined to assess his own leadership, in an interview with the Italian daily *Il Fatto Quotidiano*. He explained: "The Church is not a business, or an NGO, and the pope is not an administrator who has been commissioned to balance the numbers at the end of the year." He added that in governing the Church he "doesn't follow my own will, to pursue my own ideas, but to listen, alongside all of the Church, to the words and will of the Lord."

And in a podcast that the Vatican prepared— and released as a "Popecast"— he spoke of his horror at the bloodshed occurring in Syria, Ukraine, and elsewhere. "Behind the wars, there is the arms industry; that is diabolical," he said.

When asked what gift he would like for his anniversary, the Pope replied: "Peace; we need peace."

British chaplain dismissed for answering questions on Christian marriage

(13-3-23) A Catholic hospital chaplain has sued the National Health Service, saying that he was dismissed from his post for answering questions about Church teaching on marriage.

Father Patrick Pullicino came under scrutiny after a homosexual patient, who was planning to marry his partner, asked what the Catholic Church would say about that plan. After being reprimanded and ultimately ousted because he accurately conveyed the Church's teaching, the priests said that he was convinced the NHS was not "prepared to tolerate having a chaplain on site who would not affirm what the Catholic church teaches to be sin."

In a letter about the case, a representative of the NHS said that the commitment to diversity "takes precedence over religious belief."

Feminists vandalize at least 5 Latin American cathedrals, basilicas on International Women's Day

(13-3-23) Various marches were held on March 8 for International Women's Day in Latin America. Some feminist groups, however, used the occasion to vandalize Catholic churches and public buildings.

Mexico was one of the countries where the most violence took place. In the country's capital, Mexico City, protesters attacked the metropolitan cathedral located in Constitution Plaza. Faced with the fences protecting the church, they opted to tear down a nearby traffic light. In images shared by local media, several women can be seen hitting part of the fence attempting to destroy it, while the police try to disperse them by firing tear gas.

In Puebla, about 80 miles southeast of Mexico City, local feminists tried to destroy the angel statues that sit on top of the fence in front of the cathedral. City hall was also hit with graffiti and vandalism. Something similar was experienced in Mérida. Future priests weren't spared either, as the walls of the Xalapa Minor Seminary were tagged with graffiti and some windows were destroyed.

Similar situations were experienced in Salta, Argentina, Santa Cruz and Cochabamba in Bolivia.

Cardinal Czerny calls on universities to become incubators of radical ecological action

(13-3-23) Cardinal Michael Czerny, SJ, the Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, made his remarks at Gonzaga University, in a talk entitled "Caring for our Common Home, in This World and with This Climate".



Chile sees another arson attack on a church

(13-3-23) A Mapuche guerilla group claimed responsibility for an armed arson attack on a church in the village of California in Araucanía Region.

Moscow Patriarch appeals to Pope to help stop eviction of monks from Ukraine

(13-3-23) Patriarch Kirill of Moscow made his appeal after the Ukrainian government ordered the eviction of monks of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) from Kyiv Pechersk Lavra

Indian Church hails govt opposition to same-sex marriages

(13-3-23) A Catholic Church official in India has welcomed the federal government opposing same-sex marriage in the Supreme Court as the court heard a plea seeking to legalize such unions.

"It is indeed a commendable job by the Indian government and we appreciate it," Bishop Peter Paul Saldanha of Mangalore, a member of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India's Office for Doctrine, told UCA News on March 13.

The Church considers same-sex marriage as unnatural and does not accept "that which is unnatural because we follow what God has taught us where a family dwells as father, mother, and children," Saldanha said. "The Catholic Church in India neither promotes nor propagates same-sex marriages. It is always for men and women and a happy family," he added.

In an affidavit on March 12, the Indian government said it opposed recognizing same-sex marriages in the Supreme Court, saying it “is not comparable with the Indian family unit concept of a husband, a wife and children.” “Living together as partners and having sexual relationships with same-sex individuals is not comparable with the Indian family concept,” India’s law ministry told the court.

Thousands flee as UN hears reports on Myanmar

(13-3-23) Thousands of villagers, including Catholics, have fled their homes as the military in Myanmar escalated attacks amid the UN Security Council’s move to hear reports from special envoys on the civil war in the southeast Asian nation.

The new flare-up between the army and the rebel groups, which also includes Christians, has prompted thousands of villagers in Demoso township in predominantly Christian Kayah State, a mountainous eastern region bordering Thailand, to take shelter in relatives’ homes and in forests, according to local sources.

They said at least 3,000 people have fled their homes since March 10 when the fighting increased.

Catholics in Indonesia go green

(13-3-23) Catholics in Indonesia have gone green to make Lent a time of realizing ecological justice for all creatures, a call made by their prelates.

Taking inspiration from Pope Francis’ ecological encyclical *Laudato si* (Praise be to you), the Indonesian bishops’ conference has set “Ecological Justice for All Creation: More Loving and More Caring” as the theme for its pastoral letter for Lent this year. In the letter, the bishops asked Catholics to take concrete actions to respond to environmental damage that has caused global climate change. In St. Laurentius Wasior parish, Manokwari-Sorong Diocese in West Papua province, Catholics worked with the local forestry service to plant mangroves on the coast of Wondama Bay district on March 11.

Eli Leihitu, an official from the district’s forestry service, said the department was grateful for the participation of Catholics, considering that 25 hectares of mangrove forests in the area are threatened with destruction. In West Kalimantan, an area where many forest areas have been converted for palm oil plantations, an awareness program on the environment is undertaken among the faithful, according to Father Desideramus Ansbi Baum. In Flores, a predominantly Catholic area, the local church gave tips to school students about the importance of caring for the environment.

14-3-23



Pope reflects on women’s capacity for care

On March 11, Pope Francis received participants in a conference organized by the Strategic Alliance of Catholic Research Universities and the Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation, named after Pope St. John Paul II’s 1991 encyclical.

The two organizations published *More Women’s Leadership for a Better World: Care as Driver for our Common Home*.

Reflecting on the book—for which he wrote the preface—Pope Francis

discussed “three aspects of care as a contribution that women make ... greater inclusivity, greater respect for others, and confronting new challenges in a new way.”

Women, said the Pope, “are uniquely able, in their way of acting, to synthesize three different languages: the language of the mind, the language of the heart and the language of the hands ... better than any machine, for no machine can feel beating within itself the heart of a child in the womb, or collapse, exhausted yet happy, at the bedside of a child, or weep with sadness or happiness in sharing the sorrows and joys of a loved one.”

Vatican seeking ceasefire in Ukraine, Cardinal Parolin reports

(14-3-23) Vatican diplomats are “trying to use all our creativity” to bring peace to Ukraine, Cardinal Pietro Parolin told reporters, adding that “the first step should be a ceasefire.”

The Vatican Secretary of State said that Pope Francis is still hoping to visit both Kiev and Moscow, “because he believes that a service to peace can only be done if he manages to meet the two presidents.”

During the same March 14 exchange with journalists, Cardinal Parolin also commented on the Vatican’s secret deal with China, saying that “both sides want to continue.” He said that the Vatican’s goal is “that Catholics can be Catholics with a link to the universal Church.”

Commenting on the German bishops’ decision to bless same-sex unions, the cardinal said: “A local, particular Church cannot make a decision like that, which involves the discipline of the universal Church.”

Vatican ‘foreign minister’ admits problems with China accord



(14-3-23) The Vatican’s top foreign-affairs official has acknowledged that a secret deal with Beijing was “not the best deal possible,” but confirmed that the Holy See is “committed to carrying forward that dialogue.”

Archbishop Paul Gallagher, in an interview with EWTN, said that Vatican representatives are now “negotiating improvements” to the accord, which was originally signed in 2018 and has twice been renewed for 5-year periods.

The original agreement was the result of years of negotiations, the archbishop said, and reflected the fact that Chinese officials “were only prepared to go so far and to agree to certain things.”

He said: “It wasn’t really a great time to sign the deal, for various reasons. It was always going to be difficult; it was always going to be used by the Chinese party to bring greater pressure on the Catholic community, particularly on the so-called underground Church.”

Papal encouragement for Church in Spain’s mission outreach efforts

(14-3-23) On March 11, Pope Francis received members of Misión América on its 30th anniversary. The non-profit organization was formed as an outreach of Spain’s dioceses to Latin America.

In his Spanish-language address, Pope Francis discussed visibility, respect, volunteering, and collaboration.

Pope, cardinals concelebrate Mass for papal anniversary

(14-3-23) On the tenth anniversary of the election of Pope Francis, the Pontiff and the cardinals who reside in Rome concelebrated Mass in the chapel of Domus Sanctae Marthae, the Vatican guest house in which the Pope lives.

20 years after US invasion, Iraq still suffers, patriarch says

(14-3-23) Chaldean Catholic Patriarch Louis Raphael Sako reports that twenty years after the first US military intervention in Iraq, the country’s people are still suffering from the consequences.

The people of Iraq were initially happy with the removal of Saddam Hussein and the promise of democratic rule, Cardinal Sako recalled. “However, in a short time, the climate changed,” he said, as open borders allowed Islamic fundamentalists to gain influence, and there was no effective central government to maintain stability.

“The power vacuum that has been created has been filled by Al Qaeda, ISIS, and other Islamic parties,” the Iraqi prelate told AsiaNews. “Iraq is a rich but weak nation, in which everyone has been able to steal more or less undisturbed.”

300 attacks on US Catholic churches since 2020

(14-3-23) The vandalization of a parish church in Connecticut this past weekend was the 300th act of violence against an American Catholic church since May 2020, Catholic Vote reports.

In more than a dozen instances, pro-abortion radicals disrupted a Mass, the group notes. The disruption of a religious service is a violation of the federal FACE act: the same legislation that is

being used by federal prosecutors to pursue pro-life activists.

Brian Burch, the president of CatholicVote, said: "Our second Catholic president has shown a reckless disregard for the Church in America," as the attacks on Catholic churches and institutions go unpunished.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew praises Pope's priorities and prudence

(14-3-23) Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, who holds a primacy of honour among the Orthodox churches, said in a letter to Pope Francis that "over these ten years, our friendship and collaboration, especially in the ministry of bringing comfort and peace to all God's people, and in the mandate to promote care and healing for all God's Creation, have brought us closer together in our common conviction and commitment to see the face and welcome the presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the least of our suffering brothers and sisters."

"Dear Brother Francis, we appreciate the priorities of your leadership, applaud the prudence of your actions and admire the progress of your mandate," added the 83-year-old Ecumenical Patriarch, who was installed in 1991.

Grand Imam of Al-Azhar pays tribute to papal efforts to build bridges, promote peace

(14-3-23) Grand Imam Ahmed Al-Tayyeb of some Sunni Muslims to be the highest Muslim to Pope Francis on the tenth anniversary of the Document on Human Fraternity in Abu Dhabi. The 77-year-old Grand Imam, who assumed office in 2010, wrote, "I proudly appreciate your illustrious journey over the past ten years, during which you have sought to build bridges of love and the values of human fraternity among all human beings, and your tireless efforts to promote the values of human fraternity of religions as a basis for achieving the peace for which we all yearn." "Our world today is full of challenges, conflicts and difficulties on all moral, economic and social levels, which increases the suffering of many people; therefore, the responsibility of leaders and a consistent emblematic figure like yourself to alleviate the suffering of people and the oppressed becomes great," he added.



Al-Azhar (Egypt), considered by theological authority, paid tribute to his election. The two signed the Document on Human Fraternity in Abu Dhabi in 2019.

office in 2010, wrote, "I proudly past ten years, during which you fraternity among all human the values of human fraternity of religions as a basis for "Our world today is full of moral, economic and social

becomes great," he added. "I pray to God to bless your efforts in the pursuit of peace and to help us, together with you and all people of goodwill, to fulfil our religious and moral duty to promote peace and consolidate mutual knowledge and solidarity."

Nigeria - Over 5 million trees to be planted in 5 years: the project to combat desertification promoted by the Nigerian Bishops

(14-3-23) The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) is to plant 5.5 million trees over the next five years to mitigate the effects of climate change in the country. Consequently, the conference launched a tree planting campaign tagged: 'Green Revolution Campaign', which is being championed by Caritas Nigeria.

Speaking at the launch of the project in Abuja, CBCN President, Archbishop Lucius Ugorji of Owerriha, said that over 50 dioceses of the church have been directed to plant 20,000 trees. Archbishop Ugorji explained that the project is geared towards saving the environment from imminent destruction due to the menace of climate change which manifests in form of excessive rainfall, rising sea levels, floods, severe droughts, desert encroachment in 12 Northern states, loss of biodiversity and conflicts due to scramble for shrinking agricultural and grazing lands.

Myanmar - One thousand young people confirmed as civil conflict worsens

(14-3-23) The Lord confirms them in faith, which will help them live through the hardship, precariousness and suffering around them. A total of 1,173 young people have received the

Sacrament of Confirmation in recent days in the diocese of Myitkyina, capital of Kachin State in northern Myanmar. It was Cardinal Charles Maung Bo who administered the Sacrament and gave a light slap to each confirmed, according to the rite: "This means being willing to suffer for the faith and face the insults and wounds of others", he remarked. With confirmation, said the Cardinal, the baptized person receives the gift of the Holy Spirit: "Today the Lord strengthens your mission to bear witness to Christ", even in situations of trial and suffering, he underlined.

Turkey - New earthquake of magnitude 4,7 in southeastern Turkey: the missionaries continue to provide their assistance

(14-3-23) After the serious earthquake which on February 6, destroyed entire neighborhoods between Syria and Turkey, a new shock recorded on March 14 shook the earth in the south-east of Turkey. The earthquake, of magnitude 4.7, occurred in Kahramanmaraş, with its epicenter in the Goksun district. Now again, the Camillians through the Camillian Disaster Service International have joined the Capuchin Friars present in the places affected, especially at the mission stations of Antioch and Mersin.

The Capuchins are present in Mersin and Antioch, two areas hard hit by the earthquake and where Brother Lorenzo Motti, provincial superior of the Capuchins of Emilia-Romagna, recently went for an inspection. Fortunately, the convent in Mersin was not totally destroyed and currently about 80 people are housed in the fraternity, including a dozen children and young people and a baby just 2 months old who lost his father. In Antioch, on the other hand, the situation appears more dramatic and the convent has almost completely collapsed. Some areas of the centre have been cleaned up and, once the emergency phase, which is still ongoing, is over, a long-term project will be evaluated to ensure safety and stability for the earthquake victims.

Brazil - Fraternity Campaign: born in the Catholic Church, but wants to address the whole of Brazilian society

(14-3-23) On March 13, a solemn session of the plenary session of the House of Representatives was held in Brasilia, dedicated to the Campaign for Fraternity 2023, whose theme is "Fraternity and Hunger" and the motto "Give them something to eat yourselves" (Mt 14:16). "We want to pay homage to the initiative of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil, which leads to reflection and community commitment for actions of solidarity that can combat this scourge that afflicts a considerable part of the Brazilian population", motivated the request for the session, presented by Ms. Juliana Cardoso and Mr. José Guimarães. The message of the President of the House of Representatives read: "We do not have the right to remain inactive until the citizens of this country are confident that they will be able to cook their next meal. We must act, and act fast, because hunger is pressing."



Haiti - Priest of the Clerics of St. Viator kidnapped while celebrating funeral

(14-3-23) Father Jean-Yves Medidor, priest of the Clerics of St. Viator, a collaborator in the Christ-Roi le Meilleur parish of Port-au-Prince, was kidnapped in Croix des Bouquets. The kidnapping took place on Friday, March 10, while the missionary was celebrating a funeral. He was attacked and kidnapped by an armed gang of hooded men who put him in a car and drove off.

(16-3-23) "Father Jean-Yves is still in the hands of his kidnappers. They are not answering our phone calls and the pressure is increasing". This is what Father Nestor Fils-Aimé, Provincial Superior of Canada of the Clerics of Saint Viator, reports to Fides about the story of his kidnapped confrere.

"I arrived in Haiti on a pastoral visit on Wednesday March 8, 2023, he says, and it was Father Jean-Yves who came to greet me at the airport, then on Friday the 10th, he was kidnapped by an armed mob while celebrating a funeral".

15-3-23

All Christians must be evangelists, Pope tells audience

(15-3-23) At his regular Wednesday audience on March 15, Pope Francis stressed that all Christians—not only priests and religious—have a duty to evangelize. Here's is what he said: In our continuing catechesis on missionary zeal, we now consider the apostolic dimension of evangelization. In the Creed, we profess that the Church is "apostolic". An "apostle" is literally one who is "sent". In the Scriptures, we read that Jesus chose the twelve Apostles, called them to himself and then sent them forth to proclaim the Gospel. After his resurrection, he appeared to the Twelve and said: "As the Father has sent me, so now I send you", breathing upon them the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins (*Jn 20:21-22*). Within the diversity of ministries and charisms in the Body of Christ, all the baptized are called and sent forth to advance the Church's apostolate. Those who are ordained have received the mission of teaching, governing and sanctifying in Jesus' name and authority, yet all the members of the faithful, as sharers in the Lord's priestly, prophetic and regal office, are called to be missionary disciples, "apostles in an apostolic Church". May the recognition of our common dignity and equality inspire us to ever greater unity and cooperation in proclaiming, by word and example, the good news of our salvation in Christ.

Pope to Grand Ayatollah: Christians and Muslims must be witnesses of truth and love

(15-3-23) Pope Francis has written a letter (currently available in Italian and Arabic) to Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani on the occasion of a high-level meeting of Catholic prelates and Shiite Muslim clerics in Iraq. Pope and the Grand Ayatollah met there in March 2021.



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Belgian bishop says Pope accepted policy allowing same-sex blessings

(15-3-23) In an address to a meeting of the German Synodal Path, Bishop John Bonny of Antwerp recounted how the Belgian bishops approved a policy opening the door to blessing of same-sex unions.

The Belgian bishops' policy gave diocesan bishops the final say on such blessings. But the Flemish bishops chose to adopt a common policy, and issued a statement supporting the blessings.

Bishop Bonny said that the Flemish bishops discussed the issue with Pope Francis, and he said: "This is your decision. I can understand this." He said that the Pope was most concerned that the Flemish bishops had all agreed on the policy.

The Vatican has not offered any public comment on the Flemish bishops' policy.

Pope speaks out against eviction of nuns in Ukraine

(15-3-23) At the conclusion of his public audience on March 15, Pope Francis spoke out against a Ukrainian move to oust Russian Orthodox nuns from the Kiev Lavra monastery.

"I ask the warring parties to respect the religious places," the Pope said. "The nuns and people consecrated to prayer—whatever denomination they belong to—are the support of God's people." Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill had appealed to the Pope to support the nuns.

Sri Lanka: cardinal urges lawmakers to resign

(15-3-23) Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith of Colombo has challenged the members of Sri Lanka's parliament to resign, saying that their refusal to provide funding for local elections—as ordered by the nation's top court—"undermines the foundations of democracy."

African Catholics give cold reception to Pope's call to decriminalize homosexuality

(15-3-23) In a January interview, Pope Francis criticized laws criminalizing homosexuality as "unjust," while noting the sinful nature of homosexual acts.

"The Pope's opinion is not the Magisterium," said an unnamed "senior Church official" in Africa. "For a

change of doctrine, the Catholic Church has a decision-making process of its own. This is imperative, even when it comes to the Pope.”

(The Pope’s remarks were not without precedent. In 2008, Father Federico Lombardi, then director of the Holy See Press Office, said that “the rejection of all unjust discrimination—recognized clearly by the Catechism of the Catholic Church itself—evidently excludes not only the death penalty, but all violent or discriminatory penal legislations in relation to homosexuals.”)

Historic building near Vatican to become Four Seasons hotel

(15-3-23) The building is part of the headquarters of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem. *The Wall Street Journal* offers additional details of the 30-year lease of the property.

Waves of attacks displace Catholic natives in central Nigeria

(15-3-23) While the controversial presidential election on Feb. 25 still dominates Nigeria’s main news, recent terrorist raids in Benue, a predominantly Catholic state in north-central Nigeria, are getting scant mention.

Six counties in the Middle Belt state have seen deadly attacks by Fulani militants since the election, according to Mike Uba, the county chairman of Guma, adjacent to the state capital of Makurdi. The affected counties are both in the north and southern borders of the state.

One of the most recent attacks, on March 7, left at least 20 residents dead in the village of Tse Jor after about 40 attackers with machetes arrived on motorbikes and slashed defenseless men, women, and children for at least two hours, Helen Tikyaa, an aid worker employed by the Catholic Diocese of Makurdi, told CNA. Tikyaa said she drove to the village during the attack but dared not go in until the killers had departed. Women and children from Tse Jor and surrounding villages are still streaming into internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Naka, 20 miles west of Makurdi, Tikyaa said.

“It was the first time the community saw such violence since the killings started in 2001, and the attackers came without warning,” Father Remigius Ihyula, a priest administering aid in Makurdi, told CNA in a text message. “The motive could be nothing short of terrorism and the desire to inflict pain and disperse populations to occupy the deserted areas.” Benue has more than 1 million people struggling to survive in makeshift camps due to terrorist raids that have depopulated large areas and prevented hundreds of thousands of small farmers from accessing their four-acre farms, Fr Ihyula said.

The attacks continued 62 miles east of Tse Jor on March 7, according to Father William Shom, who pastors a church in Yelewata, Guma County. An attack by Fulani terrorists who came in large numbers to Yelewata that evening left seven people dead. The terrorists also burned 27 houses, Father Shom said in a text message to CNA.

Pope appoints new Secretary of Dicastery for Evangelization

(15-3-23) Pope Francis has appointed Archbishop Fortunatus Nwachukwu, 62, as the Secretary of the Dicastery for Evangelization’s Section for First Evangelization and the New Particular Churches. A native of Nigeria and a Vatican diplomat, Archbishop Nwachukwu has represented the Holy See at the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, since 2019.



Under the 2022 reform of the Roman Curia, the Roman Pontiff himself is the Prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization. The Dicastery has two sections, each led by a pro-prefect and assisted by a secretary. Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle leads Archbishop Nwachukwu’s section; Archbishop Rino Fisichella leads the Section for Fundamental Questions regarding Evangelization in the World.

Togo - Faith can grow even in the difficulties that all missionaries face every day

(15-3-23) "Each of our young people has a story to live, to tell. We would like to share some of their reflections on mission, the joys, the difficulties, the challenges". It was Fathers Walter Woamede and

Silvano Galli, of the Society for African Missions (SMA), who spoke at the end of the first trimester exams of the propaedeutic school that the SMA carry out in Lomè.

The testimonies collected among the students were numerous and varied, but their common thread always leads back to the sense of the missionary vocation of each one. "A missionary is a person called by Christ to follow him, he must leave his culture, his environment and enter the culture of others. He is called to leave behind him, to forget where he comes from. He has to learn other languages, other traditions. I thank the Lord for my vocation". And again: "In the life of the missionary there are joys and difficulties. Joy is found above all in him who sent him, Christ. Pope Francis said: 'The beauty of consecration is joy. And there is no holiness in sadness'.

One of the students added: "A missionary is one who has received a call and wants to follow it to receive a mission and fulfill it - said another student. He must not be afraid or discouraged, he must be strong and trust in God. We must not forget that many lose their lives in mission, as happened to our confrere Fr. Adrien Jeanne, killed in Côte d'Ivoire".

South Africa - "Protests over the just demands of healthcare workers must not harm patients," says Bishop of Mthatha

(15-3-23) The South African Labour Court of Appeal has ordered public health workers to end a week-long strike that has affected some of the country's main hospitals. Members of the National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU) have been on strike since last week after wage negotiations with the government failed.

"The method of fighting for fair wages must be balanced with the healthcare workers' oath to save lives", said Bishop Sithembele Sipuka of Mthatha in a statement in which he renewed his "sympathy for the cause of healthcare workers, but the end of their cause does not justify the cruel and criminal means" adopted to achieve it. "Let me be clear, health workers care for the poor with great sacrifice, most of the time with inadequate provision of means and space to do their work. As we saw during the height of Covid, sometimes they pay the ultimate price of losing their lives". Healthcare workers - continues the Bishop of Mthatha - "deserve to be respected, treated well and paid well. By all indications and facts, this is not done and not because of a lack of complaining by health workers but because of the lack of care by the authorities".

"This, however, does not justify their method of raising their noble call for a decent wage, which includes preventing the sick poor from accessing health services when they need them most, intimidating those who choose to work and damaging hospital properties".



China - Give thanks to God on the peaks of Mount Lú. Lenten pilgrimages to the Marian shrine of Lushan for the feast of Saint Joseph

(15-3-23) Lushan, "Mount Lú", is a mountain located in the district of the same name, south of the city of Jiujiang, in the Chinese province of Jiangxi. From a distance, you can admire countless peaks that blend into the clouds with enchanting landscapes. It was precisely in this region that French Lazarist missionaries erected the Church dedicated to the Assumption of Mary in 1894,

with the intention of offering a spiritual oasis to the Catholic communities of the regions of Shanghai, Nanjing and Wuhan, as well as all the cities in Jiangxi province. This is where the Catholic community in Jiujiang, Jiangxi province, also brought its faithful today for a Lenten pilgrimage and the days leading up to the feast of Saint Joseph, who is also venerated as Patron of missions in China. Way of the Cross, adoration, sacrament of penance to retrace the life of Jesus who, in his passion, entrusted himself to the embrace of the Father.

The parish priest, Father Pang Rui, and the nuns led the pilgrimage, inviting everyone to walk in the footsteps of Saint Joseph, "to learn the virtues of obedience to the Lord, his fervent piety, dedication to the service of the Holy Family".

Asia - Like the Magi and the great missionaries to scrutinize the signs of the times: the path of the Church in Asia

(15-3-23) The Final Document of the General Conference of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), held in Bangkok from October 12 to 30, 2022, published today, March 15, a list of missionaries such as Alessandro Valignano, Roberto de Nobili, Matteo Ricci and João de Brito, who followed a specific approach to the mission in Asia.

The final document, titled "Traveling Together as the People of Asia" comprises 40 pages and five parts, according to five stages: walking together; looking at the emerging realities of Asia; discerning what the Spirit is saying to the Church in Asia; to offer our gifts, which are Asian culture and spirituality; opening new paths. The inspiration comes from the journey of the Magi who knew how to scrutinize the signs of the times, and from the work of Matteo Ricci who "wanted to embody the faith in a specifically Asian context and culture".

Chile - Promoting effective and real intergenerational relationships: new project for the care of the elderly

(15-3-23) Given the situation of vulnerability in which thousands of elderly people live in Chile due to uncontrollable events like Covid-19, the Elderly Program of Caritas Chile strives to strengthen the work of contact persons and diocesan teams of elderly people, from an integral perspective, which includes caring for older people and their environment, through attention to their rights, participation and organization of older people, and networking, from local to national level. This Caritas Chile project is possible thanks to the contribution of the German Foundation for the Elderly in the World, chaired by Christel Wasiek, whose director and members of the organization met the Caritas Chile team to develop details of this new initiative.

According to the note sent to Fides, the project "Strengthening networks of assistance to the elderly in Chile" will be launched on the occasion of the national meeting of diocesan representatives and teams, which will be held from March 20 to 22 in Santiago.

Malaysia's Christian minister dismisses proselytization claim

(15-3-23) Malaysia's Youth and Sports Minister Hannah Yeoh dismissed allegations from political rivals that her ministry's programme to visit houses of worship of various faiths was meant to convert Muslim youths.

Yeoh, 43, a member of the ruling Democratic Action Party, refuted the allegations during a speech in parliament, *Malay Mail* reported on March 14.

She said the programme Projek Article 11 by Impact Malaysia, a non-profit agency under the ministry, did not have any Muslim youths when the team members visited mosques and Sikh Gurdwara this month. No Muslim youth has registered for a programme to visit a church later this month, she noted. Yeoh said that the programme known as "Jom Ziarah" aims to promote a better understanding of the different races, religions, and cultures in Malaysia.

"Jom Ziarah is a combination of efforts to know the differences between religions, and to help people in Malaysia's multi-ethnic society to live in harmony and tolerance, she said, adding that the program is an exercise of freedom of religion guaranteed in Malaysia's Federal Constitution. The lawmaker from Segambut, a constituency in the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur, reacted after Islamists and political rivals accused the programme of evangelizing Muslim youth.

Yeoh lodged a police complaint against the Muslim politician Badrul Hisham Shaharin, a blogger and former member of the People's Justice Party, on March 13 for spreading false information about the programme, media reports say.



Sex claims against Indian Catholic school head fall apart

(15-3-23) The sexual assault case against a Catholic school principal in a central Indian state has taken a new turn with students and parents dismissing the allegations as false and demanding action against those behind it.

"It is a false case and no such incident took place in the hostel and the school," said Akhilesh Yadav, whose two daughters are studying in Jabalpur Diocesan Education Society Higher Secondary School in Junwani, a village in Dindori district in Madhya Pradesh state. "My daughters were forced to give false statements against the principal and others," Yadav said. "I was offered a check for Rs 10,000 to ensure that my daughters gave a false statement against the principal and others," he asserted. "When I turned down the check and refused to join them, I was threatened," he said and added that other parents also had a similar experience.

The school has been in the eye of a storm since March 3 following a surprise inspection by members of the State Commission for Protection of Child Rights. During the visit, a Grade 11 girl reportedly told the team that the principal had touched her inappropriately. Shivkumar Pusam, a close relative of the girl who accused the principal of inappropriate action, told UCA News on March 14 that "no such incident had taken place." "It is true the principal mildly slapped the girl when she went out to buy sweets during class time and it was misrepresented as a case of sexual assault," Pusam said.

Radheshyam Kakodia, the spokesperson of the Gondwana Ganatantra Party, an indigenous political outfit, also called the charges "totally baseless."



Catholics build new church in strife-torn Myanmar

(15-3-23) Catholics in a remote village in conflict-torn Myanmar have built a new church through the combined initiative of the local community and internally displaced people (IDPs).

The new St. Stephen Catholic Church at Lana village in Ding Sing parish of Kachin state was blessed by Bishop Raymond Sumlut Gam of Banmaw along with two priests on March 12.

Bishop Gam hailed the initiative and said the new church building was much needed as thousands of IDPs had sought refuge in the village near the China border since fleeing their homes in 2011.

Indian court refuses to lift ban on Catholics' endogamy

(15-3-23) A top court in southern Indian Kerala state has refused to stay a lower court's order, which declared illegal the practice of endogamy among a section of Catholics.

The high court in Kerala, however, agreed to hear an appeal challenging the lower court verdict issued on April 30, 2021. The appeal was filed by Archbishop Mathew Moolakkatt of Kottayam, which was established for the endogamous Knanaya Catholic community within the Eastern rite Syro-Malabar Church.

Archbishop Moolakkatt in his plea said the lower court order "would overturn and uproot the practice and customs followed by the Knanaya community for over 17 centuries." He was referring to the practice of Catholics in his archdiocese, who would not accept members marrying outside their community to maintain the purity of blood. The Catholics in the archdiocese, a diocese until 2005, claim to have their origin from a group of Jewish-Christian emigrants from Cana in Southern Mesopotamia that came to the Kerala coast in AD 345.

16-3-23

Japanese feminist nun among 7 named to preparatory commission for October Synod of Bishops

(16-3-23) Cardinal Mario Grech, the Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, has established a preparatory commission for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which will convene in October 2023 and again in October 2024.

The seven members of the preparatory commission are: Father Giacomo Costa, SJ (coordinator), Mgrs. Tomasz Trafny (secretary), Archbishop Timothy Costelloe, SDB, of Perth (Australia), Bishop Daniel Flores of Brownsville (USA), Bishop Lucio Muandula of Xai-Xai (Mozambique), Father Dario Vitali, a theology professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University and Sister Shizue Hirota, MMB (Japan).

Pope Francis's 2018 apostolic constitution *Episcopalis Communio* provides that "for further exploration of the theme and for the redaction of any documents that may be issued prior to the Synod Assembly, the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops may avail itself of a Preparatory Commission, made up of experts. This Commission is appointed by the General Secretary of the Synod, who chairs it."

In a 2019 article ("Women and the Catholic Church: People of God vs. Hierarchical Church"), Sister Hirota wrote:

I don't think that the "feminism" Pope Francis [criticizes] exists anywhere in today's world. Feminism believes in God, who is Father and Mother. Feminism is our way of living so as to follow Jesus. God created the first human being as "man and woman" in God's Image (Imago Dei, Betselem Elohim) as noted in Genesis 1:27, and again, first as the ungendered "the earthling," ha adam—from adamah, "earth," as Genesis 2:7 tells us. We are to incarnate the image of God that is revealed in masculinity and femininity to be present in a world where life frequently is not prioritized. We participate in God's creative work to love the hurting world to heal, liberate, and nurture the planet and human beings. The participation of women is needed to make the world a space where justice and peace are possible. Feminism means this conviction and way of life!

Another pope can take up priestly celibacy issue, says Francis

(16-3-23) "I don't feel ready to reconsider it yet, but obviously it's a matter of discipline, which has nothing to do with dogma," the Pope said in one of a recent flurry of interviews. "Today it's the case and tomorrow it may no longer be."

"We'll see that the time will come when a pope, perhaps, will revisit it," he added.

Pope welcomes Taiwanese Buddhists to 'culture of encounter'

(16-3-23) In a March 16 address to representatives of Humanistic Buddhism from Taiwan, Pope Francis praised "the culture of encounter, in which we take the risk of opening ourselves to others, trusting that we will discover in them friends and brothers and sisters, and in the process learn and discover more about ourselves."



Pope: Design of sacred architecture must flow from Church's liturgy

(16-3-23) In an Italian-language message on the occasion of the 26th public session of the Pontifical Academies, Pope Francis called for "adequate spaces in which the Christian community can worthily celebrate the holy liturgy according to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council."

Papal message to Latin American congress on abuse prevention

(16-3-23) Abuse remains a "clear and present danger" to the faithful, and poorer dioceses must establish reporting systems, Pope Francis said in a message to the 2nd Latin American congress on abuse prevention.

The Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors offered Twitter coverage of the conference.

Police warn of potential Islamist attack on Vienna's churches

(16-3-23) "There is a nonspecific threat of an assault against churches," according to Vienna's police. "Points of interest have been put under increased guard by regular and special operation police"

forces, and "police officers are equipped with bulletproof helmets and vests and assault rifles." The Archdiocese of Vienna announced that its churches would remain open. "While we were informed by police about the general threat, we were also told that there is no imminent danger for Catholics," said an archdiocesan spokesman.



Papal appeal for cyclone-hit Malawi

(16-3-23) Following his March 15 general audience, Pope Francis prayed for the victims of Cyclone Freddy. He also called for prayers in a tweet.

Iraq - Qaraqosh, tensions and disputes around the role of the "Babylonian Brigades"

(16-12-23) In the area of Qaraqosh, a predominantly Christian city in the Nineveh Plain, tensions are growing between armed militias and local self-defence units composed largely of armed men who claim to belong to indigenous Christian communities. At the centre of the tensions are the so-called "Babylonian Brigades", which have always insisted on claiming their label as paramilitary formations composed of Christians, even though they are usually considered as aligned with more consistent and powerful pro-Iranian Shiite militias, such as the Popular Protection Units (Hashd al Shaabi). In recent days - local sources report - the Babylonian Brigades detained and seized seven Christian members of the so-called Nineveh Plain Protection Units (NPU). The seizure of the NPU members came after several dozen residents of Qaraqosh had taken to the streets to show their support for the NPU and demand that the Babylon Brigades step aside and renounce their claim to present themselves as militias engaged in exercising law and order functions in the Nineveh Plain, an area of traditional rooting of Iraq's indigenous Christian communities.

Colombia - Proclaiming the gift of life: "to be a Church of life and for life"

(16-3-23) "We are the people of life!" is the motto chosen by the Bishops' Conference of Colombia for the celebration of the "Week for Life 2023", which will take place from 19 to 26 March. The initiative aims to promote the culture of life in the country, in a special way, to proclaim the gift of life and defend the life of the unborn child and that of its mother.

"It is an opportunity to renew our being a Church of life and for life" underlined the Department for the Promotion and Defense of Life, which organizes the Week, which is celebrated within the framework of the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord to the Virgin Maria, on March 25th. For practical participation in this week, the Bishops' Conference proposes reflection on the value of life at three levels (individual, family and community) and three ways of assuming it drawn from the Gospel (proclaiming life, celebrating life and serving life).

Indonesia Church seeks compensation for road evictees

(16-3-23) An Indonesian Church advocacy group has urged President Joko Widodo to pay compensation to people affected by road construction work undertaken in preparation for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit.

Father Simon Suban Tukan, chairman of Divine Word's Commission for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, said the government did not pay attention to the plight of those evicted for the road project in Labuan Bajo, the western tip of Flores Island.

The 25-kilometer road stretch having a width of 23 meters was inaugurated by Widodo on March 14. It leads to the special economic zone in Golo Mori, some 25 kilometers to the south of the tourist town, Labuan Bajo which will host the ASEAN Summit in May. "The good road to Golo Mori has sacrificed the rights of the residents whose homes and land were taken away without compensation," Father Tukan told UCA News. At least 51 families from the villages of Cambi, Nalis, and Kenari, most of whom were farmers, were evicted while 23 houses, 14,050 square meters of yards, 1,790 square meters of rice fields, and 1,080 square meters of fields were taken away.

The families were living in tents for months with little hope of building new homes or practicing agriculture as the road project had damaged the irrigation system.

Catholics in Myanmar launch Lenten charity drive

(16-3-23) Catholics in Myanmar have been asked to show solidarity during Lent with people suffering in the civil-war torn Southeast nation by reciting prayers and doing charity.

Father Henry Eikhlein, administrator of Patheingyi diocese in the Irrawaddy region, a fertile delta close to the Bay of Bengal, said the diocese has urged the clergy to give the Lenten message of prayer, fasting and charity to parishioners. "Catholics have been urged to do more on prayers and donations for the affected people to show solidarity," Father Eikhlein told UCA News on March 16. Donations will be used by Karuna Myanmar for emergencies, internally displaced people in war-torn nation.

St Marillac's feast brings joy to Filipino street children

(16-3-23) Thousands of street children flocked to churches in the Philippines on March 15 to receive food and relief materials during the feast of French Saint Louise de Marillac, the patron saint of social workers. They had received an invitation from the Louisiana Foundation that sent more than 1,000 volunteers across the country for the feast of its founder.

Saint De Marillac, who was canonized in 1934, founded the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, a female religious congregation that takes care of poor children.



Chinese Christians detained during Sunday liturgy

(16-3-23) Chinese police and religious affairs officials allegedly interrupted a Sunday liturgy, detained Christians, and assaulted church leaders in the southwestern part of the country, reports a rights group.

The premises of the Early Rain Covenant Church, an independent Protestant church in Chengdu of Sichuan province was raided when about 100 Christians gathered for Sunday worship on March 12, China Aid reported citing sources within China. The church's deacon, Jia Xuwei, and six members were arrested by plain-clothed officers and taken to Tuqiao police station for questioning. They were released in the evening. Xuwei was allegedly beaten by police officers. Some church members were also reportedly beaten as they attempted to record with their mobile phones the raid and assault.

US report censures Indian states' anti-conversion laws

(16-3-23) The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has called for the repeal of anti-conversion laws in India that have been enacted by state governments and often misused to prosecute Christians in the country.

The commission, a US federal government entity, on March 14 said in its latest report, compiled after an extensive study, that the sweeping anti-conversion laws in India are inconsistent with the international human rights regime. More Indian states are considering introducing such laws, it added. The commission has recommended that the US State Department designate India as a country of "particular concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act. According to the report, anti-conversion laws are in force in 12 of India's 28 states.

"The anti-conversion laws also worsen religious freedom conditions in India, which are already poor," the report said. "Such laws enable and embolden existing government harassment, vigilante violence, and discrimination against religious minorities, as well as crackdowns on civil society organizations," it noted. It has also stressed the need for repealing these laws to comply with international human rights treaties to which India is a signatory.

According to the United Christian Forum, an inter-denominational group that monitors the persecution of Christians, there were 598 incidents of violence in 2022, which represents a 400 percent spike compared with 2014, when Modi first came to power in India.

Myanmar massacres 'were to start religious conflict'

(16-3-23) Another massacre in Myanmar — the fourth this month — was designed by the military to ignite a religious conflict, the National Unity Government (NUG) said March 16 after releasing the grisly details of the killings of 29 civilians including three monks.

It said claims by the junta that those killed were justified as they were members of the NUG's armed wing, the People's Defense Force (PDF), were wrong and trumped up in a bid to turn the Buddhist clergy against those opposed to the military takeover two years ago.

17-3-23

Trial testimony: Pope sought quick exit from troubled London deal

(17-3-23) Pope Francis told Vatican officials to resolve a London real-estate deal, "and lose as little money as possible," when he learned about problems with the deal, Archbishop Edgar Pena Parra told a Vatican tribunal in March 16 testimony.

Archbishop Pena Parra, the *sostituto* or deputy Secretary of State, blamed a subordinate, Msgr.

Alberto Perlasca, for signing contracts that eventually led to a €15 million loss for the Vatican without proper approval. Msgr. Perlasca has said that Pope Francis approved the contracts.

Neither Msgr. Perlasca nor Archbishop Pena Parra is a defendant in the current case. Archbishop Pena Parra became *sostituto* in October 2018, when the Vatican was already deeply involved in the London deal. His predecessor as *sostituto*, Cardinal Angelo Becciu, is the leading defendant.

New papal decree for administration of Dicastery for Evangelization

(17-3-23) Pope Francis has issued a decree giving Cardinal Luis Tagle, the pro-prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization, full legal authority over the 2nd section of the dicastery, which is responsible for First Evangelization and New Particular Churches.

The decree implements the reforms of the apostolic constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, reforming the offices of the Roman Curia. That document split the dicastery into two sections. The 1st section, for Fundamental Questions regarding Evangelization in the World, is also headed by a pro-prefect, Archbishop Salvatore Fisichella. Pope Francis himself serves as prefect, with authority over the two sections. Because the 2nd section administers resources headed for the mission territories, the papal decree gives Cardinal Tagle and his successors the authority to control those resources.



Pope urges religious to uphold 'the primacy of God's love'

(17-3-23) Pope Francis met on March 17 members of the Congregation of St. Joseph, and urged them to bear in mind constantly "the primacy of God's love." The Pope contrasted that approach with a strictly disciplinary attitude. He said: "When you want to regulate everything, you cage the Holy Spirit. And there are many —religious, consecrated, priests and bishops—who have caged the Holy Spirit."

New app allows China to track religious worshippers

(17-3-23) China's new "Smart Religion" app, through which believers register for religious services, allows the government to track all personal information about worshippers. The app is a product of the Beijing government's new policy requiring advance registration for anyone attending a service in government-approved houses of worship.

Argentina - The deepening wounds of drug trafficking and the chronic lack of responses

(17-3-23) A new alarm for the worsening of drug trafficking with all its harmful consequences has been launched by the Episcopal Commission for Social Pastoral Care of the Argentine Bishops' Conference, under the title "The Wounds of Drug Trafficking".

The text recalls the words of the Bishops when they highlighted the drama of drug trafficking many

years ago, and "the suffering faces of those who are trapped and condemned by one of the greatest calamities of recent times, such as drug use and addictions". According to the Bishops, the drug business had now established itself throughout the country, with a strong penetration especially in the poorest neighborhoods on the outskirts of large cities, destroying families and sowing death.

India's Cardinal Alencherry to face trial in land deal

(17-3-23) India's top court has dismissed an appeal by the head of the Eastern rite Syro-Malabar Church, Cardinal George Alencherry, to quash seven criminal cases against him in connection with a controversial land deal in his archdiocese.

A division bench of the Supreme Court headed by Justice Dinesh Maheshwari on March 17 turned down the 77-year-old cardinal's appeal paving the way for him to face trial in land deals he executed some five years ago in Ernakulam-Angamaly Archdiocese in southern Kerala state.

Cardinal Alencherry moved the Supreme Court in April 2022 against an August 2021 order of the Kerala High Court which directed him to face trial in seven criminal cases. The cardinal also sought a stay on the high court order. However, the Supreme Court refused to accept it but agreed to hear his contentions.

A group of priests in the archdiocese publicly accused him along with two senior priests and a real estate agent of selling several plots of land over a period of two years, incurring a loss of US\$10 million to the archdiocese. After a sustained public campaign, the Vatican took away his administrative powers as archbishop of Ernakulam-Angamaly, and now the archdiocese is run by an apostolic administrator. Cardinal Alencherry, however, still holds his title as the major archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church with a population of more than half a million in India and abroad.

Korean saint's memorial church gets heritage site listing

(17-3-23) A memorial church that houses the remains of the first Korean priest, St. Andrew Kim Tae-gon, has been listed as a National Cultural Property by the South Korean government, Church sources say.

The Cultural Heritage Administration notified Bishop Matthias Ri long-hoon of Suwon diocese about St. Andrew Kim Tae-gon Catholic Church's listing on March 15, the diocesan website reported. The church at the Mirinae Catholic shrine in Anseong, a city about 50 kilometers south of the capital Seoul, was built in 1928. It houses the remains of the saint, the coffin that first contained his body after his martyrdom in the 19th century and a graveyard in the front.

The church is the fifth Catholic site in Suwon diocese listed as a National Cultural Property.



Indian police nab Hindu leader for priest extortion plot

(17-3-23) A right-wing Hindu leader's attempt to extort money from a Catholic clergyman by threatening to implicate the priest in a false sexual assault case has landed him in jail in a southern Indian state.

Muthuvel, who goes by a single name and is district secretary of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP World Hindu Council) in Ariyalur in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, was remanded in judicial custody following his arrest on March 13. The arrest followed a complaint from Father Dominic Savio, parish priest of Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Ariyalur in Kumbakonam diocese. "Muthuvel through one of his agents, Vinod Raj, a Catholic, demanded I pay Rs 2.5 million (US\$30,306). Failing which, he threatened to embroil me in a sexual assault case," Father Savio told UCA News on March 16. The police also obtained conversations between Raj and Muthuvel, allegedly conspiring to foment communal violence in the city with another person agreeing to fund them to the tune of \$6,000. Police have charged Muthuvel with provocation with the intent to cause a riot, promoting enmity between different groups on the grounds of religion, and an intentional insult to breach the peace.

As part of his extortion plot, Muthuvel allegedly threatened to accuse him of harassing girls in his schools. The priest is co-ordinating the administration of three diocesan schools. He had even allegedly sent a group of women to protest in front of his church to put pressure on the priest. "Muthuvel has filed several bogus sexual assault cases before," the priest said. "Every time he filed a fake complaint I had to face questioning, but on March 13 when his henchmen demanded money, I recorded it and lodged a complaint," he added. The police immediately swung into action and arrested him.

Muthuvel also targeted church people in January 2022 when he accused the hostel warden of the Sacred Heart Higher Secondary School in Michaelpatti in Thanjavur district in Tamil Nadu of forcing a 17-year-old girl to commit suicide after she allegedly refused to convert to Christianity. Sister Sahaya Mary, a 62-year-old member of the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, also known as the Pondicherry Blue Sisters, was arrested and jailed in connection with the suicide. The nun was released on bail several months later. The case is now being investigated by the Central Bureau of Investigation, a federal agency.



Christian concerns grow as Pakistan pushes digital census

(17-3-23) Pakistan's minority Christians are giving lukewarm response to the government's first-ever digital population and housing census rolled out on March 1, with promises to be transparent and inclusive.

The massive undertaking aims to gather demographic data on every individual ahead of this year's parliamentary elections. It is also expected to serve as an effective tool for planning measures for the socioeconomic development of the nation's poor.

Government records show a steep decline in the Christian population during this period. According to the 2017 national census, Pakistan had 2.6 million Christians who form just 1.27 percent of its 207 million people, mostly Muslims against the 1998 count of 1.59% when the national population was 132 million.

Church leaders allege Christian numbers were hugely under-reported in the 2017 census. A repeat, they fear, could have an adverse impact on the community, including lesser political representation, reduced access to services, and increased discrimination and marginalization. A further fall in Christian numbers may crush Christians' decades-old demand for an increase in representation for religious minorities, from the current 10 seats to 14 seats in the 342-member national assembly. However, since individuals have also to declare their religion, Christian communities of all denominations are working to educate the faithful, especially those who are non-literate or less educated, on the procedure for registering, so that they can participate in the census correctly: "It is important to give the right number of Christian faithful in Pakistan.

Therefore Pastors, Bishops, political and social leaders and workers, educated people are called to do everything so that all Christian families are registered. If there is a need to go to the homes of less wealthy Christian families to help them register, do so. If possible, set up a small gazebo or pew in your neighborhood, or outside churches to sensitize everyone to register", hopes Christian Rohail Zafar, Secretary General of the "Pakistan Minority Rights Commission".

Indian police search ex-bishop accused of economic crimes

(17-3-23) Federal officials combating economic crimes in India have raided the office and residence of a former bishop of the Protestant Church of North India (CNI), who was sacked by his Church following allegations of money laundering some six months ago.

The officials of the Enforcement Directorate (ED), the economic intelligence agency responsible for enforcing economic laws and fighting economic crime in India, ended on March 17 a two-day raid of the residence of former bishop P. C. Singh of Jabalpur in central Indian Madhya Pradesh state.

The latest raid comes six months after state officials of the Economic Offences Wing (EOW) raided Singh's residence in Jabalpur and arrested him on charges of money laundering.

18-3-23

Malawi – Tropical cyclone - More than 400 dead and 200,000 displaced

(18-3-23) Roads and bridges washed away, entire communities isolated, unable to receive aid. Homes and infrastructures, thousands of families are without shelter, exposed to the elements. These are some of the first results of tropical cyclone Freddy which hit the African region twice in a few weeks. The situation continues to worsen in the area of the archdiocese of Blantyre, whose archbishop has requested all the people to extend every help possible to the affected people.

Pope to Italian youth: world needs “good politics” that promote peace

(18-3-23) Meeting in the Vatican with some 150 representatives of companies and cooperatives of the “Progetto Policoro” sponsored by the Italian Bishops' Conference, Pope Francis highlights the urgent need for “better politics” in our war-torn times.

Pope: welcoming refugees points way forward for future

(18-3-23) Addressing a group of refugees arriving in Europe through the ‘Humanitarian Corridors’ project, Pope Francis said the initiative protects the dignity of migrants, breaks down walls of indifference, and provides a hopeful vision for the future in Europe.

19-3-23

Pope: Open your eyes and be surprised by God's gifts

(19-3-23) At the Sunday Angelus in Saint Peter's Square, Pope Francis, referring to the day's Gospel, recalled how Jesus gives sight to a man blind from birth; he described how this miracle brought about a variety of reactions in people.

The Pope added that we should all read this episode in the Gospel of John recounting this miracle of Jesus, a short and beautiful story of how much the Lord loves us. We read how people respond in different ways to the Lord's gift of sight to the blind man, whether with a welcome heart, a lukewarm heart, a fearful heart, or a courageous heart.

the Pope said we should put ourselves in the shoes of the protagonists in this Gospel episode and think about how we would have reacted. Are we able to see and be grateful for the gifts we receive from God, the Pope asked.

“Let us ask the grace to be surprised every day by God's gifts,” he said. and to see the various circumstances of life, even the most difficult to accept, as occasions to do good, as Jesus did with the blind man. May Our Lady help us in this, together with Saint Joseph, the just and faithful man.”

Pope close to quake-struck Ecuador

(19-3-23) Pope Francis said he is praying for the victims of a strong earthquake that shook southern Ecuador and northern Peru on Saturday night. The 6.8 magnitude quake has killed at least 16 people and left others trapped under rubble. An estimated 381 people were injured in the quake.

Speaking during the Angelus address on Sunday, the Pope said he is close to the people of Ecuador and he assured his prayers for all those who have died or are injured.



“Let us ask the grace to be surprised every day by God's gifts and to see the various circumstances of life, even the most difficult to accept, as occasions to do good, as Jesus did with the blind man.” Pope at Angelus on 19 March 2023.
