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Vatican archbishop open to decriminalization of assisted suicide

(24-4-23) The president of the Pontifical Academy for Life has said that the Church might accept the decriminalization of assisted suicide, in the latest clear sign that the body established by Pope John Paul II to defend the dignity of human life has radically changed its stance.

In an April 19 speech, Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, which was published in Italy by the leftist journal *Il Reformista*, the archbishop said that a change in Italian law to

allow for assisted suicide “could not be ruled out,” and in fact “is feasible in our society.”

Archbishop Paglia said that he was personally opposed to assisted suicide, but that in a pluralist society, “legal mediation may be the greatest common good concretely possible under the conditions we find ourselves in.”

Reacting to the furor caused by the archbishop’s statement, the Pontifical Academy for Life issued a clarification, underlining Archbishop Paglia’s personal opposition to assisted suicide and stressing that he said “legal mediation (certainly not moral) is possible.” The statement went on to say that “Archbishop Paglia has always supported the need for accompaniment towards the sick in the terminal phase of life.”

Pope outlines vision for lay ministry; Vatican to publish document on those who have remarried outside the Church

(24-4-23) In an April 22 address to the second plenary assembly of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, Pope Francis outlined his vision of lay ministry in the Church.

In his apostolic constitution on the Roman Curia (*Praedicate Evangelium*, 2022), Pope Francis established that curial dicasteries should hold plenary sessions, typically every two years, that involve all of their members (Article 26). The theme of the Dicastery’s second plenary assembly, held from April 20 to 22, was “Laity and Ministry in a Synodal Church,” with special reference to *Praedicate Evangelium*, Article 133, which involves the institution of new ministries.

The Dicastery, in addition to its leadership, has 28 members and 23 consultants. The Dicastery noted that “some 35” members and consultants were in attendance at the plenary assembly.

Before the papal address, Cardinal Kevin Farrell, the Dicastery’s prefect, delivered a brief Italian-language greeting to the Pope, in which he stated that

- the Dicastery is in the initial stages of reflection on the development of a specific ministry for married couples to those whose marriages are “experiencing crises and problems of all kinds”
- the Dicastery is “also working on the preparation of a text that will specifically concern, as you wished, Your Holiness, men and women who, having a failed marriage behind them, live in new unions.”

Cardinal Farrell did not say when the Vatican would publish this document on those who have remarried outside the Church.

In his address of participant in the Dicastery’s second plenary assembly, Pope Francis distinguished between

- the instituted lay ministries of lector, acolyte, and catechist, which involve “a public intervention of the Church—a specific act of institution,” and are “connected with ordained ministry, because they involve various forms of participation in the task that is proper to them, even if it does not demand the sacrament of Ordination.”
- a much broader field of lay ministry

“Lay ministeriality,” the Pope stated, is based upon the Sacrament of Baptism and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. By virtue of Baptism, all of the faithful—the laity, the consecrated, and the ordained—are “believers in Christ, His disciples, and are therefore required to take part in the mission He entrusted to the Church, also through the assumption of determined ministries.”

“The ministeriality of the faithful, and of laypeople in particular, stems from the charism that the Holy Spirit distributes within the People of God for its edification: first a charism appears, inspired by the Spirit; then, the Church acknowledges this charism as a useful service to the community; finally, in a third moment, it is introduced and a specific ministry spreads,” he continued.

Common examples of this broader non-instituted lay ministry, said the Pope, are “supplementary services,” such as reader and extraordinary minister of the Eucharist. The Pope noted that “pastors can entrust certain supplementary functions to laypeople, that is, temporary services, as in the case of the proclamation of the Word and of the distribution of the Eucharist.” But in addition to such services, “the laity can carry out a range of tasks, which express their participation in the prophetic and regal function of Christ: not only within the Church, but also in the environments where they are integrated. There are some that are supplementary, but there are others that come from the baptismal origin of the laity.”

Examples of these other services include

- those “linked to old and new forms of poverty, as well as migrants, who urgently require action of welcome and solidarity. In these areas of charity, many services can arise that take the form of genuine ministries.”
- a ministry of evangelization, arising from the Sacrament to Marriage, to one’s children and other married couples. Citing documents by Popes St. Paul VI and St. John Paul II, Pope Francis—as he has done in the past—offered high praise of St. Paul VI’s apostolic exhortation on evangelization (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1975). “This exhortation of St. Paul VI is valid today, it is current. Please: pick it up again, reread it, it is very topical. With so many things, when one finds them again (one says): ‘Ah look, the farsighted Montini.’ You can see there, that farsightedness of the great saint who led the Church.”
- “many other” ministries that “could be added, acknowledged in various ways by the ecclesial authorities as expressions of the ministeriality of the Church in a broad sense.”

Pope Francis then expressed his anger at “self-referential” lay ministers who are not focused on service:

One thing we must remember, though: these ministries, services, offices, must never become self-referential. I get angry when I see lay ministers who—pardon the expression—are “puffed up” by this ministry. This is ministerial, but it is not Christian. They are pagan ministers, full of themselves, aren’t they? Beware of this: they must never become self-referential. Service is one-directional, it is not a round trip: that will never do ... At times you see laypeople and they seem to be default priests.

Please: clean up this problem.

In concluding his address, Pope Francis stated the various types of ministeriality that he listed have two things in common: mission and service.

In particular, I like to emphasize that at the root of the term ministry there is the word *minus*, which means “minor”... Those who follow Jesus are not afraid to make themselves “inferior,” “minor,” to place themselves at the service of others. Indeed, Jesus himself taught us: “whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all” (Mk 10: 43-44). Here lies the true motivation that must inspire any of faithful who assume an ecclesial task, any commitment to Christian witness in the reality where he or she lives: the willingness to serve the brethren, and in them, to serve Christ.

Pope Francis established the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life in 2016, and the Dicastery held its first plenary assembly in 2019, devoted to “the identity and mission of the lay faithful in the world.” The Pope delivered an address at the time, in which he warned against the clericalization of the laity,

spoke about the importance of women, and emphasized that permanent deacons should be removed from the altar:

They become permanent deacons, and instead of being the custodians of the service in the diocese, they immediately look at the altar and end up being “failed priests,” halfway priests. I advise the bishops: “Remove the deacons from the altar,” that they go to service. They are the caretakers of service, not first-rate altar boys or second-rate priests.

Council of Cardinals meets, with new membership

(24-4-23) The Council of Cardinals convened on April 24, for the first meeting since Pope Francis named new members to his top advisory council in March.

Four members of the Council remain in place: Cardinals Pietro Parolin, the Secretary of State; Fridolin Ambongo Besungu of Kinshasa, Oswald Gracias of Mumbai, and Sean O'Malley of Boston.



The new members are Cardinals Fernando Vérgez Alzaga, president of the Governorate of Vatican City State; Jean-Claude Hollerich of Luxembourg; Gerald Lacroix of Quebec, Juan José Omella Omella of Barcelona, and Sergio da Rocha of San Salvador de Bahia, Brazil.

Archbishop Marco Mellino acts as secretary of the council.

Originally established to advise the Pontiff on the reform of the Roman Curia, the Council of Cardinals—commonly referred to as “C9” in a reference to the number of members—completed that task with the promulgation of the apostolic constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* last year. By extending the group’s mandate and renewing its membership, the Pontiff indicated that he wants to continue receiving its advice. The most recent meeting of the Council, last December, was devoted to a discussion of the Synod on Synodality.

Former Pope’s secretary must leave Rome, Pope says

(24-4-23) Pope Francis has told Archbishop Georg Gänswein, who was private secretary to the late Pope Benedict XVI, that he should leave Rome soon.

Joaquin Morales Sola, an Argentine journalist who interviewed the Pope last week, reported that: “Pope Francis wanted the archbishop to leave his apartment in a couple of months. Mr. Morales Solá reported that “Francis reminded Gänswein that all the private secretaries of the popes had returned to their dioceses when the pope died.”

On paper Archbishop Gänswein retains his title as prefect of the Pontifical Household. However, in 2020, after a brief uproar over a book in which the Pope-emeritus and Cardinal Robert Sarah defended clerical celibacy, Pope Francis instructed Gänswein to devote all his energy to the care of the retired Pope—effectively dismissing him from the Pontifical Household.

Niger - Sand identity and Ramadan in Niamey

(24-4-23) "There is no traffic in the city because the celebration of the conclusion of the holy month of Islam, Ramadan, the name of the ninth month of the Muslim calendar which means ‘burning heat’ is being celebrated", writes to Fides Father Mauro Armanino, A missionary of the Society of African Missions (SMA) from Niamey, the capital of Niger.

"Nothing is more true given that in these days the temperatures have been around 42 and 43 degrees centigrade in the shade when there is and that, in the capital, 44 degrees are expected for the weekend. Aid el Fitr - it means that fasting is over and that, after prayer and the profession of faith, the feast begins which in some parts lasts three days. This is followed by almsgiving to the poor, cordial greetings to brethren in the faith, gifts and festive clothing.

During the month of Ramadan, after evening prayers, food was distributed to the poor at the mosques. Many homeless, internally displaced and needy migrants have profited from this particular form of ritual solidarity. They are the best representatives, perhaps without knowing it or wanting it, of

so called sand identities. Having abandoned their country of origin because, often, abandoned by them, they remake other and multiple migrant identities. They are then defined irregular and in the past they were simply clandestine because they were unwilling to entrust our common sand identity to 'printed documents'".

They are in fact - writes Father Armanino - thousands of migrants 'covered up' in Niger at the border with Algeria. But also elsewhere they are now installed in the offices of the International Organization for Migration and in the numerous bus stations.

Chile - "Builders of peace, sowers of hope" in the context of the security crisis and rampant violence

(24-4-23) "We believe that the paths of peace must be built by all of us, with determination and unity, with a global approach. We reject any form of violence to achieve political, social or economic objectives. We sow hope, restoring trust in institutions and strengthening the social fabric of our Christian communities". This is the appeal launched by the Bishops of Chile in the message published at the end of their Plenary Assembly, which was held from April 17 to 21 in La Florida, Santiago. Reflecting on the social situation, the bishops first of all underline "the serious security crisis we are experiencing in Chile". They therefore join in the pain and anguish of so many inhabitants of the country, who "live in the uncertainty of a criminality which does not seem to spare any manifestation of violence".

The bishops recall that on Sunday, May 7, the Chileans will have the opportunity to take a new step forward in the constitutional process that the country is going through, choosing the councilors who, together with a group of experts, will have to present a new proposal for the Political Constitution of the Nation.



India - Resignation and appointment of bishop of Jaipur

(24-4-23) On April 22, 2023, the Holy Father Francis accepted the resignation from the pastoral care of the diocese of Jaipur, India, presented by Bishop Oswald Lewis.

The Holy Father has appointed the Reverend Joseph Kallarackal, of the clergy of Ajmer, until now parish priest of the Immaculate Conception Cathedral in Ajmer, as bishop of Jaipur, India.

Msgr. Joseph Kallarackal was born on 10 December 1964 in Anavilsam,

Kerala. He studied philosophy and theology at Saint Joseph's Regional Seminary in Allahabad and obtained a Master of Arts in political sciences from Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati University in Ajmer. He was ordained a priest on 2 May 1997 for the clergy of Ajmer.

After ordination, he first served as vice-rector and rector of the Saint Theresa's Minor Seminary, Ajmer, and parish priest and director of Saint Anselm's School, Nagaur. He also holds a Bachelor of Education degree. He served again in parishes and also was director of two schools.

Police arrest Indian Orthodox priest for molesting young girl

(24-4-23) Police in a southern Indian state have arrested a 77-year-old priest of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church for allegedly molesting a young girl.

The priest identified as Shimayon Ramban was arrested and remanded in judicial custody on April 21. The priest is charged under various provisions of a special law meant to protect children from sexual abuse in India.

Police said the priest based in Kerala state was arrested following allegations that he had molested a 15-year-old girl on April 3 in a church in Muvattupuzha in Ernakulam district.

The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, also known as the Indian Orthodox Church, is one of seven churches that trace their faith to St. Thomas the Apostle, who, according to a tradition, preached in India.

Indian court orders food security cover for 80 million people

(24-4-23) India's top court has come to the rescue of over 80 million migrant labourers who have been deprived of government's various welfare schemes for want of mandatory identity proof (ration card) to avail the welfare benefits including free food.

The Supreme Court in a significant judgment on April 20 has ordered the provinces and the Federal government ruled territories to issue ration cards to migrant labourers in their jurisdiction within three months.

"It is definitely a very important judgment in favor of the migrant labourers in the country," asserts Father Franklin Menezes who is working among migrant workers in Kolkata, the capital of West Bengal state in eastern India.

Sri Lankan Church awaits justice 4 years after Easter bombings

(24-4-23) The Sri Lankan Church organized a 40-kilometer-long human chain on the fourth anniversary of the Easter Sunday bombings to demand justice for its victims.

Thousands of people belonging to different faiths joined on April 21 to protest the government's failure in response to the call given by Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith of Colombo. A two-minute silence was observed at 8.45 am in memory of the people who died in the attack. Many protesters were dressed in black and carried black flags, besides posters and banners.

Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith addressed religious leaders, foreign diplomatic, survivors, and family members of the victims, at the St. Anthony's shrine in Kochchikade, a suburb of Colombo. He alleged that Saharan Hashim, leader of the National Thowheed Jamath (NTJ), who led the suicide attacks on Easter Sunday, had close ties with the government military intelligence. "We regret that the government has failed to investigate the relationship between the military intelligence and Saharan's terrorist group," said Cardinal Ranjith. He further demanded that the government should interrogate officials who were in charge of the intelligence unit at the time of the Easter Sunday bombings.

"We have a question about how the seventh bomber named Jameel killed himself despite the opportunity to save his life. Did he explode himself or someone else blasted him with a remote control? We have a question in this regard," the cardinal asked. Cardinal Ranjith said the leadership of the present government cannot be trusted. "We regret the Attorney General's Department, police and the government has hesitated even to do what the Presidential Commission has recommended," he said.

Earlier, a vigil march was held from St. Sebastian's Church in Katuwapitiya to St. Anthony's shrine in Kochchikade. The march which commenced at 7 pm on April 20 concluded at 8.20 am on the next day.

Malaysian Church mourns pioneering bishop

(24-4-23) Catholic Church in Malaysia mourned retired Bishop James Chan Soon Cheong of Malacca Johore Diocese, the first native bishop of the diocese hailed for his efforts in implementing the church's renewal process and pastoral activism in the light of the Second Vatican Council.

Bishop Chan passed away at MAJODI Center in Plentong of Johor state on April 22 at the age of 97, says an official announcement. He had served the diocese from 1972 to 2001.

In 1972 Pope Paul VI appointed him the first bishop of Malacca Johore after creating a new diocese by taking territories from the Archdiocese of Malacca-Singapore.

Philippines bestows special status on centuries-old church

(24-4-23) A 435-year-old Baroque-style church in the Philippines was declared an "important cultural property" by the government on April 22. *Nuestra Señora de los Remedios* (Our Lady of the Remedies), more popularly known as "Malate Catholic Church" in the capital Manila, was recognized by the National Museum of the Philippines for its historical and cultural role.



25-4-23

German bishop questions ban on sacraments for Catholics who avoid ‘church tax’

(25-4-23) A German bishop has questioned the policy that bars people from the sacraments if they formally remove their names from the rolls of registered Catholics.

The German bishops’ conference has set a policy that classifies Catholics who ask to be removed from the rolls as having defected. Thus, they cannot receive Communion, marry in the Church, or serve in parish or diocesan offices.

Bishop Ansgar Puff, an auxiliary of the Cologne archdiocese, recently questioned that policy, asking: “Is it right to no longer invite them to our table?” The question is pertinent particularly in German dioceses where Protestants are invited to Communion, as are Catholics who are divorced and remarried, and active homosexuals.

The parish rolls are particularly crucial in Germany, where the government assesses a surcharge on the taxes of registered believers, handing those funds over to the churches. As a result, the German Catholic Church is extremely wealthy. However, lapsed Catholics have an incentive to end their registration, and every year many thousands do so. In 2021 (the most recent year for which accurate figures are available), a stunning 359,338 people formally left the Church.

In 2006, the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts—the Vatican body charged with the interpretation of canon law—stated that “the juridical-administrative act of abandoning the Church does not per se constitute a formal act of defection as understood in the Code, given that there could still be the will to remain in the communion of the faith.” The German bishops’ policy appears to conflict with that ruling.

Vatican prefect, leading Mideast prelates gather in Cyprus

(25-4-23) Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti, prefect of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches, traveled to Cyprus for “Rooted in Hope,” a four-day conference that marked the tenth anniversary of Pope Benedict XVI’s post-synodal apostolic exhortation on the Church in the Middle East (*Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, 2012).

The Patriarchs of the Chaldean Catholic Church and the Maronite Catholic Church were among the prelates in attendance. Patriarch Pierbattista Pizzaballa, OFM, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, offered a 15-page analysis of the Church in the Middle East, and Bishop Paolo Martinelli, OFM Cap, the Vicar Apostolic of Southern Arabia, reflected on Christian formation and education.

Leading Indian nun warns of vocation decline, ‘lazy’ missionaries



(25-4-23) “Almost every congregation has a decrease in vocations, and it threatens its sustainability,” said Sister Maria Nirmalini, the president of the Conference of Religious India. There are more members of religious orders in India than in any other nation.

“I have observed a decline in the passion and dedication among them compared to our earlier missionaries, who were ready to die for their faith and mission,” she added. “Today, many prefer to confine themselves to their comfort zones or escape from criticism by the [Hindu] religious fanatics. The pandemic has

created many lazy missionaries, and some even got addicted to alcohol and social media.”

Grammy Award winning producer: Sacred music has come to life again

(25-4-23) In a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, Blanton Alspaugh writes that “across the Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant traditions, a new generation of American composers is writing important and distinctly American music for worship, in ways that both draw on tradition and renew it.”

“Pope Benedict XVI’s belief that traditional forms of liturgy could cross-pollinate and renew contemporary worship appears to have been prescient,” adds Alspaugh, a Presbyterian who has won 11 Grammy Awards as a classical music producer.

Cape Verde - Cape Verdeans begin the journey to celebrate the first 500 years of the Gospel on the Island of Santiago

(25-4-23) A state in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, a bridge that seems designed to connect Africa, Europe and America. Cape Verde is an archipelago composed of ten volcanic islands (only one is uninhabited) that are about 500 kilometers from the coast of Senegal. Though enjoying relative peace from the time of Independence in 1975, poverty and emigration have characterized the population, particularly with the problem of scarcity of water.

"According to the latest census - explains to Fides Father Antonio Ferreira, president of the national commission for the jubilee of the 500th anniversary of the evangelization of Santiago – there are about 500 thousand people living in Cape Verde, the majority are young or very young (more than 75%, ed.). Now there are more Cape Verdeans outside than inside the Archipelago. It was the diaspora that helped the population to face the curse of COVID.

The population largely belongs (more than 90 percent) to the Catholic Church, which has been present in the Archipelago since the 15th century. "There are also other denominations," adds Father Ferreira, "and coexistence is very peaceful." The local Church, with its two bishops - Cardinal Arlindo Gomes Furtado, Bishop of Santiago, and Ildo Augusto Dos Santos Lopes Fortes, Bishop of Mindelo - has already begun the long journey toward the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the evangelization of the island of Santiago, which took place under Clement VII in 1533. "We live this time with joy and want to take advantage of the Holy Year for Cape Verde as an opportunity to implement a revision of our ecclesial journey, finding new ways to respond to the work of the Holy Spirit." Meanwhile, next year, in 2024, Cape Verdeans will also celebrate the centenary of the birth of Amilcar Cabral, the hero of the anti-Portuguese resistance, "the protagonist of the independence of Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau, whose memory is still very much alive in the country".

China - Reopening of shrines after 3 years. Chinese Catholic communities are preparing for the Marian month

(25-4-23) "We can join the universal Church, remembering the prayer intention of Pope Francis and imitating Our Lady the Virgin Mary in following Christ her Son, to reveal the face of the Risen Lord and live a new life". With these words, the Archdiocese of Beijing embraces and accompanies the enthusiasm with which many Chinese Catholic communities are preparing to experience the gestures and practices of Marian devotion during the month of May, which is traditionally dedicated to Our Lady. Pilgrimages, rosaries, hours of adoration, processions and solemn Eucharistic celebrations, works of charity. The doors of shrines, churches and chapels will always be open, after years of forced closures due to the pandemic. And dioceses such as Beijing and Shanghai have already published the program of celebrations and timetables for daily community prayer, including the provisions and logistical indications that must be followed in order to take part.

Modi apprised of Christian concerns

(25-4-23) Church leaders in a southern Indian state have called on visiting Prime Minister Narendra Modi and apprised him of the concerns of the Christian community. Leaders from seven Church denominations met Modi on April 24 in a private hotel in Kochi, the financial capital of Kerala.

Cardinal George Alencherry, head of the Kerala-based Eastern rite Syro-Malabar Church, termed the meeting with Modi "very successful." The Latin Catholic Archbishop Joseph Kalathiparambil carried with him a written memorandum listing, among other issues, the concerns of the larger Indian Church outside the tiny but populous state of Kerala. In a video released on *Shekinah News*, a Catholic news channel based in Kerala, Cardinal Alencherry said the delegation



discussed burning issues of violence against Christians and reservation quota for Dalit (former untouchables) Christians with Modi.

The meeting comes amid allegations that ever since Modi came to power in New Delhi in 2014 attacks against Christians have increased, particularly in northern states, most of them ruled by Modi's pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Modi is also accused of being silent against Hindu violence against Christians. Dalit Christians in the country have been demanding social benefits given to lower caste people but Modi's government has been opposing it saying Christianity has no castes. Cardinal Alencherry also said they apprised Modi of farmers' issues and the plight of fishermen in Kerala's coastal areas. Catholic fishermen in Kerala's capital, Thiruvananthapuram, had resorted to a massive strike against an upcoming port facility last year. The stoppage of scholarships to students from minority communities also looms large on the national conscience.

The prime minister has promised protection to all people irrespective of religious affiliations, the cardinal said in the video.

PM Modi responds positively to hosting pope in India

(25-4-23) Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi responded positively to hosting Pope Francis in India, said Cardinal George Alencherry, head of the Kerala-based Eastern rite Syro-Malabar Church on 24 April. He had earlier invited Pope Francis to visit India during their meeting in Rome on Oct. 30, 2021. Modi met Christian religious leaders during his two-day visit to Kerala.

Pope John Paul II was the last pope to visit India in 1999 when BJP's Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the prime minister. Modi is also the first Indian prime minister to meet Francis since the latter became the head of the Catholic Church in 2013.

Indonesian diocese opposes Komodo Park ticket policy

(25-4-23) Officials of Ruteng Catholic Diocese in Indonesia's Christian-majority Flores Island have joined local people and tourism operators to demand the halt of a "unilateral" government policy of ticket fees for the famed Komodo National Park. The new ticket policy "obstructs the progress of tourism, burdens tourists and tourism operators, and creates social conflict," said the diocese in an April 24 statement.

The statement was issued after a pastoral meeting on April 21 at Labuan Bajo, a popular tourism city and the gateway to the park. It asked the government to review "the very high tariff increase."



Christians slam Pakistan's 'faulty' census

(25-4-23) Christian leaders in Pakistan have slammed the ongoing national census saying the questionnaires were erratic and accused the enumerators of not counting many members of minority groups. "Many parish houses [parsonages] have been skipped. Maybe they thought no one stays in churches. Since every parish has at least three priests, at least 40 people will be missing in the count [in the city]," Father Mario Rodrigues, rector of St. Patrick's High School in Karachi, the country's largest city, told UCA News. Christian leaders

like Rodrigues in Karachi and those in other cities have issued a series of allegations against the first-ever digital census including undercounting, faulty questionnaires, and delaying tactics.

Indian court remands 5 Christians on conversion charges

(25-4-23) A court in northern India's Uttar Pradesh state has remanded five Protestant Christians in custody, a day after police arrested 10 of them, including an 18-month-old baby, for allegedly violating a state law that criminalizes religious conversions.

State police on April 23 detained several Christians attending Sunday services at two different churches in Kasimabad town in Ghazipur district following complaints from right-wing Hindu activists, who said the gatherings were attempting mass religious conversions.

“The detained Christians were interrogated inside the churches. The Christians denied the accusation and asserted that the gatherings were part of routine Sunday services,” Pastor Dinanath Jaiswal, a local cleric and social worker, told UCA News on April 24. The police later took them to the police station and continued the interrogations. However, the women and children among them were released but 10 people (including the pastor and his wife) were charged with violating the provisions of the state’s anti-conversion law. On 24th evening, the pastor and four more persons had to appear before the district court which remanded them in custody.

26-4-23

Pope will allow lay voters at Synod of Bishops

(26-4-23) Pope Francis has changed the rules of the Synod of Bishops to give votes to non-bishops, including male and female religious and lay people.

The Pope will appoint 70 voting members to the Synod. Half of these delegates will be women, and the appointments will be designed to give a greater voice to young Catholics.

In all, 21% of the participants at the October meeting of the Synod will not be bishops, said Cardinal Mario Grech, the secretary-general of the Vatican’s Synod office.

The appointment of voting delegates who are not bishops, for a meeting of the Synod of Bishops, represents a dramatic change—particularly since bishops, as successors to the apostles, bear a special charism for leadership in the Church. But Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, who will be the relator general for the October meeting, denied that the change is radical. “It’s an important change; it’s not a revolution,” he said.

Vatican preparing document on divorced-remarried couples

(26-4-23) The Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life is currently preparing a document on the situation facing Catholics who are divorced and remarried, Cardinal Kevin Farrell has revealed.

Cardinal Farrell, the prefect of the dicastery, said that the document would address “those experiencing marital crisis of all kinds.” He said that, at the wish of Pope Francis, special attention would be given to “men and women who, having a failed marriage behind them, live in new unions.”

The cardinal did not give a timetable for the release of the document.

Monasteries are ‘beating heart’ of evangelization, Pope tells audience

(26-4-23) At his weekly public audience on April 26, Pope Francis spoke about the evangelical mission of monastic communities. Here below is the summary of the Pope’s talk:

In our continuing catechesis on apostolic zeal, we now turn to the example of the saints of every age, beginning with those who embraced the monastic life. Their witness of following Christ in poverty, chastity and obedience was combined with unceasing intercessory prayer for the spread of the Gospel and the growth of the Church. Today we consider Saint Gregory of Narek, a medieval Armenian monk and Doctor of the Church, whose writings embody the profound Christian tradition of the Armenian people, the first to embrace the Gospel. In the hiddenness of his monastery, Gregory sensed a profound solidarity with the whole Church and her mission of preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ to all nations and peoples. Identifying with sinful humanity, he devoted his entire existence to interceding for sinners, the poor and those in need of the Lord’s healing and forgiveness. The example of Saint Gregory of Narek reminds us of our responsibility to cooperate, by our own intercessory prayer, in the Church’s mission of proclaiming the Gospel message of reconciliation, redemption and peace for the entire human family.



Pope’s statement for 60th World Day of Prayer for Vocations

(26-4-23) In his statement for the 60th World Day of Prayer for Vocations, Pope Francis remarks that “God’s call is grace, complete gift, and at the same time a commitment to bring the Gospel to others.” “There is no vocation without mission,” the Pope says. “There is no happiness and full self-realization unless we offer others the new life that we have found.”

The World Day of Prayer for Vocations will be observed on Sunday, April 30. The papal statement was released by the Vatican on April 26.

Vatican quietly tones down Pope’s remarks (*L’Espresso*)

(26-4-23) Veteran Vatican journalist Sandro Magister reveals that Vatican officials have regularly “found themselves having to trim and remove at least some excesses, scurrilous expressions, gutter talk.”

Vatican offices no longer provide transcripts of the Pope’s unscripted remarks, Magister reports. “Even the secretariat of state has for some time felt duty bound to put up a barrier against Pope Francis’s verbal unrestraint.”

Although Pope Francis has spoken frequently to secular journalists, he has rarely spoken with the Vatican’s own newspaper, *L’Osservatore Romano*, and the Vatican press office has often been kept in the dark, Magister writes. And “the boundless quantity of interviews that Francis grants to the most varied newspapers does not in any way pass through the filter of the dicastery for communications.”

Reports: Russian forces in Ukraine have seized a Catholic parish

(26-4-23) Russian troops have seized a Latin-rite parish in Berdyansk, according to the reports. The city of 100,000 is located in Zaporizhzhia Oblast.

Kenyan bishops call for tighter regulations on new religions after ‘starvation cult’ deaths

(26-4-23) “It is very unfortunate that we are witnessing a worrying reality in the country where so-called prophets and cultic leaders have mastered the art of exploiting gullible Kenyans in the name of religion,” Kenya’s bishops after 72 members of a new cult starved themselves to death.

The prelates wondered how the group’s founder could have been “allowed to perpetuate its dangerous doctrine for such a long time, leading to the loss of so many lives with the state security machinery completely unaware.”

Ghana – Mission Kumasi: meeting point of religion, royalty and diplomacy



(26-4-23) The 140th anniversary of Father Auguste Moreau, of the Society for African Missions (SMA),’s arrival in Manhyia, in the greater Kumasi area of the Ashanti region, was the focus of a meeting recently hosted by the Society for the African Missions in Kumasi, the capital of the former Ashanti kingdom. The Ashanti people controlled much of Ghana’s territory before the arrival of Europeans and were often in conflict with the conquerors. Even in the 21st century, they still form the largest ethnic community in Ghana. The first European explorers to arrive on the coast were the Portuguese in 1471.

The Africa Missions Society event, entitled 'Kumasi meeting point between religion, royalty and diplomacy' was intended to provide an opportunity for those involved to reflect on the contribution Father Auguste Moreau made to the development of Ghana and Kumasi in particular since his arrival. "Moreau's dedication to evangelization laid the foundation for the growth of Catholicism in Kumasi and throughout Ghana," said Father René D. Yao (SMA). "Today in Ghana there are four archdioceses and eleven dioceses with over 1,350 priests, religious and seminarians. The conference showed how mission and diplomacy can help build the country."

East Timor - Election campaign: A country in search of peace, stability and development

(26-4-23) With a view to the general elections scheduled for May 21 in East Timor, the electoral campaign has begun in the youngest nation in Asia. The President of the Bishops' Conference of East Timor, Bishop Norberto do Amaral of Maliana, in a public message, calls on politicians to promote peace and work for stability and the common good, rather than attacking one another or spreading hostility.

In the election, which is the fifth general election since 2002, Xanana Gusmão's National Congress for the Reconstruction of Timor (CNRT) and Mari Alkatiri's Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (FRETILIN) will lead the country's two largest political blocs.

Bolivia - Bishops encourage hope: 'We need honest and non-political solutions'

(26-4-23) The Plenary Assembly of the Bishops' Conference of Bolivia was held in Cochabamba from April 20th to 25th. "As a church, we proclaim the good news of God's love," reads the Bishops' message published on April 25, "but we see shadows and darkness that we must face together with faith, sincerity and good will. This is true in the absence of certainties that hover over the economy and hit the poorest hardest. Honest and non-political solutions for the good of all must therefore be sought for the economic situation in our country".

The situation of the education system in Bolivia, which is confronted with controversial tendencies, gives particular cause for concern. The bishops join calls from teachers and parents, who amid public protests, called for "the new curriculum to be revised and reformed as it reflects a lack of participation, listening and dialogue between the sectors concerned".

"We reject the forced approach of gender ideology," say the bishops, who stress the importance of giving parents at home and teachers at school the opportunity to participate in the development of a new curriculum to engage in dialogue and propose content and standards to improve the quality of education.

The bishops touched on environmental issues. indigenous people and the lands they inhabit. The bishops specifically ask to "build a culture of peace that puts aside submission, economic and political interests and respects the dignity and identity of our indigenous brothers and sisters, whose characteristics are respect, sincerity and humility". The country's heads of state and government and political leaders are called upon to "work for a genuine democracy that we must preserve and nurture"; there is also an urgent need to "start a profound renewal of the judiciary that will restore its true role and its service to the citizen".

Junta attacks hospital as ex-UN chief ends Myanmar visit

(26-4-23) A hospital in a village in strife-torn Myanmar's southern Shan state was attacked and destroyed in a military airstrike, according to media reports citing local rebel forces.

The reports said some civilians in Pekhon township were wounded in the attack on April 25. Many people were displaced and had taken refuge in a camp near the hospital, local sources said.

The bloody conflict in the Southeast Asian nation continued as former United Nations chief, Ban Ki-moon, called for an end to violence after concluding his April 23-24 visit on behalf of 'The Elders,' a group of elder statesmen from around the world that engages in peacemaking and human rights initiatives,

The military junta did not release information about the attack on the hospital but reports said there has been ongoing fighting on the border between Shan state and Kayah state between the military and local militia groups since March.



Indian Orthodox priest, 18 others acquitted in murder case

(26-4-23) A special court in southern India has acquitted 19 people, including an Orthodox priest, of murder charges following a two-decade-long legal battle.

The special court of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in Kochi in Kerala state quashed murder charges against Father Varghese Thekkekkara from the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church, and 18 others on April 24. They had been accused of involvement in the murder of TM Varghese, a member of the rival Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, in 2002 in Perumbavoor in Kerala's Ernakulam district, who was hacked to death.

Their acquittal did not go down well with the Malankara Orthodox Church, which is planning to challenge the acquittal in the state's top court, one of its officials said. The murder, according to the Central Bureau of Investigation, was over a century-old dispute within the indigenous Malankara Church.

HK film screening canceled over 'seditious' content

(26-4-23) A film festival organizer in Hong Kong canceled the screening of an independent short film after it failed to secure mandatory approval from the authorities for allegedly having 'seditious' content.

Phone Made Good Film, an independent short film group and organizer of the Loose Narratives film festival announced the withdrawal of the nine-minute film "Wake in Silence" on April 21, Hong Kong Free Press reported on April 25.

The film had failed to obtain a permit for the scheduled screening because it showed a flag with the words "100% freedom" which was deemed to have "potentially seditious intent" by the Office for Film, Newspaper and Article Administration (OFNAA).

Korean Catholics oppose new airport in Jeju island

(26-4-23) Catholics from two dioceses special Mass praying to preserve the Island, which they say will be damaged up as planned.

The Ecological Environment Diocese and the Environment Ministry jointly held the Mass "Preservation of Environment" in Jeju on April 23.

Jeju, the largest island in South Korea, beauty, making it a prime destination for local and foreign tourists. The island is a part of the autonomous Jeju province and features several natural sites recognized as world heritage sites by UNESCO.



in South Korea joined a ecologically-critical Jeju if a new airport comes

Committee of Jeju of Incheon Diocese Jeju's Ecological

is famed for its natural

Panel in China to advance Christianity 'sinicization'

(26-4-23) State-sanctioned Christian bodies in Qingdao City in eastern China have established a special committee to promote 'sinicization' of Christianity in line with the socialist principles of the Chinese Communist Party, reports a rights group.

The Christian patriotic organizations in the coastal city of Shandong province set up a new "Special Committee To Advance the Sinicization of Christianity," the first of its kind in the communist-ruled nation in March, *ChinaAid* reported on April 25.

27-4-23

Cardinal Hollerich reflects on synodality

(27-4-23) Despite the addition of lay voting members, the Synod of Bishops will remain a synod of bishops "because the bishops are the majority," Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich reasons.

Cardinal Hollerich—who as relator-general will be a key figure in the October meeting of the Synod—reminded Vatican News that "there have already been members with voting rights who were not bishops." (A small number of priests, representing religious congregations, took part in previous meetings.) The 2023 meeting will see a much larger number of lay voters, including women for the

first time.

Although he emphasizes that bishops will remain the majority of voters, Cardinal Hollerich cautions: “We do not have a synodal parliamentarianism, where the majority decides and everyone follows.” Instead, he says, the Synod relies on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and respects “the collegiality of bishops, responsibility for the Church, the primacy of Peter.”

The cardinal concludes that “synodality is the horizon in which the bishops’ collegiality and the Pope’s primacy are exercised, to seek God’s will together.”

Ukrainian PM meets Pope Francis, renews invitation to visit Ukraine

(27-4-23) Pope Francis received Denys Shmyhal, Ukraine’s prime minister since 2020, in an April 27 audience.

The prime minister subsequently met Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Holy See’s Secretary of State, and Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, Secretary for Relations with States and International Organizations.

“During the cordial discussions, which took place in the Secretariat of State, various matters connected to the war in Ukraine were highlighted, with particular attention to the humanitarian aspects and efforts to restore peace,” the Holy See Press Office said in a statement. “In the same context, several issues regarding the life and activity of the Church in the country were raised.”

Sandinista crackdown on Church continues

(27-4-23) Within the past week, Nicaragua’s Sandinista regime, led by Daniel Ortega, expelled two religious sisters from the country, as well as Father Donaciano Alarcón, a native of Panama.

Canadian parents push back against gay pride flag in Catholic school district; police called

(27-4-23) The incident took place in York Region, in the Province of Ontario.

As the report notes, “in Ontario, Catholic schools are publicly funded, and local decisions are made by a Catholic school board rather than the Catholic diocese.”

Sudan - A possible permanent truce is expected in Juba after two weeks heavy gunfire and airstrikes

(27-4-23) The 72-hour truce established on April 21 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitaries to mark the end of Ramadan should expire tonight, April 27. However, the fighting has never stopped in several areas of the country. According to the Ministry of Health, the deaths recorded in these two weeks of guerrilla warfare, with heavy gunfire and airstrikes, is more than 500 and wounded more than 4,000.

The local press reports that the President of South Sudan and member of the Commission of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development in the Horn of Africa (IGAD), Salva Kiir Mayardit, announced that the two parties have agreed to extend the truce for another 72 hours and that two delegates from the army and the RSF will discuss a possible permanent truce in Juba. The army has issued a statement in which it says it accepts the proposal, but rules out a face-to-face meeting between Burhan and Hemedti, respectively heads of the SAF and RSF.

South Korea - Vietnamese Catholics, engaged in the mission in Korea for twenty years



(27-4-23) The Vietnamese Catholic faithful present in the Archdiocese of Seoul are migrants who have settled in Korea and are fully integrated into the local Church. In recent days they participated in a Eucharist presided over by Archbishop Peter Chung Soon-Taick OCD, Archbishop of Seoul, in the Archdiocese’s Pastoral Work Center and celebrated 20 years of presence and pastoral and missionary commitment in the local Church.

He expressed his gratitude for the apostolic service of many Catholic

priests, religious and lay faithful over the past two decades.

To the more than 500 Vietnamese who were present at the celebration, Archbishop Chung said: "Living in a foreign country is difficult and requires sacrifices. All of you here endure difficulties for work or study reasons. The resurrection of Jesus is an event that gives strength, grace and blessings to all of us when we go through difficult times", he continued.

China - New priestly ordinations for Chinese dioceses on the feast of St. Mark the Evangelist

(27-4-23) From the diocese of Beijing to the dioceses of Wanxian (now Wanzhou), Sanyuan (in Shaanxi Province) and Jilin, Chinese Catholic communities welcomed six new priests ordained, as is customary, on the feast of St. Mark the Evangelist, April 25th.

In Beijing, more than seventy priests took part in the solemn priestly ordination of Fr. Joseph Guo Chen During the liturgy, which was also broadcast and followed via the internet, the newly ordained priest was exhorted "to follow the example of Christ, the eternal High Priest, and to fulfill his duties as a minister and the task of sanctification with joy and love, to serve the faithful and work for the salvation of souls, following in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd by devoting himself to the edification of the family of the Church". Also in the Cathedral of the diocese of Wanxian, Bishop Paul He Zeqing celebrated the priestly ordination of Fr. Peter Feng Longgang.

In view of the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, Joseph Han Yingjin, bishop of the diocese of Sanyuan ordained a priest and a deacon. Bishop Paul Pei Junmin of the diocese of Liaoning, ordained three priests of the Jilin community. The Tangshan community also welcomed a new deacon on the feast day of St. Mark the Evangelist.

Argentina - "We continue to trust in the democratic path" exhort the Bishops, who announce a mission among the most abandoned

(27-4-23) "What have we done with our homeland? Forty years after the recovery of democracy, we see with pain how many chances we have lost to build a flourishing and happy Argentina". The bitter observation comes from the Bishops of Argentina, gathered for the Plenary Assembly of the Bishops' Conference being held April 24-28 at the retreat house "El Cenáculo" in the town of Pilar. Among the topics on the agenda are the synodal path, youth ministry, social ministry and the educational Pact.

"Anger and tiredness are not good counselors", continued the Bishops, who invited "to continue to trust in the democratic path ... It is always possible to be reborn if we do it together. There is always a way forward if we are able to speak up and put our country on our shoulders. This is a desire that knows no yielding or parties, it belongs to a people".

The Bishops "implore those with greater responsibility" to think of the suffering of many, rather than the petty interests of a few. They inform that they have decided that all dioceses in the country will go on a mission, visiting some neighborhoods where the most vulnerable and abandoned live.



Filipinos stay put in Sudan due to lack of jobs at home

(27-4-23) Hundreds of Filipino workers are reportedly forced to stay back in conflict-hit Sudan due to a lack of job opportunities in the Southeast Asian nation.

The Philippines has evacuated 409 workers while more than 300 are on their way home after the warring factions in Sudan agreed to a 72-hour ceasefire brokered by the US and Saudi Arabia on April 24, which has helped countries evacuate their citizens.

The Philippines government remains tight-lipped on whether the repatriated workers will be given jobs upon arrival. The foreign affairs department earlier said that its primary consideration was the safety of all Filipino workers. Every Filipino evacuated from Sudan would receive US\$200 each, President Ferdinand Marcos said in a press conference on April 26.

Earlier, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) said on April 25 that it was ready to help the repatriated Filipino workers. Catholic charities are also offering help.

Japan pushes abortion pill despite pro-life protests

(27-4-23) The Japanese government plans to introduce an over-the-counter abortion pill in the country, ignoring protests from pro-life groups amid a demographic decline triggered by low-birth rates.

Japan's Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare's panel has voted to approve the usage of a pill that allows pregnant women to chemically end their pregnancy up to the ninth week of gestation, *Catholic News Agency* reported on April 25.

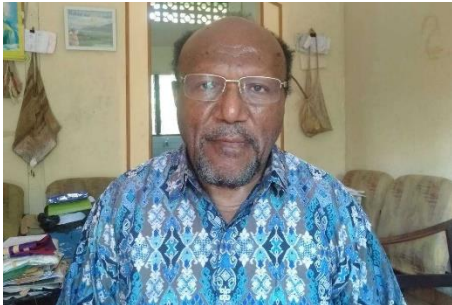
The country's health minister is expected to approve the usage of the pill which will enable millions of women to have access to the hitherto unavailable chemically induced abortion option.

Top court order offers relief to millions of Indian farmers

(27-4-23) Millions of Indian farmers who feared a possible eviction from their homes were relieved when India's top court modified its earlier order that banned all human activities within a one-kilometer radius of protected forests in the country.

The Supreme Court in its order on April 26 modified its June 3, 2022, judgment, allowing restricted activities around protected wildlife sanctuaries, national parks, and forests in the country.

"It is really a big relief for farmers," said Father Joseph Ottaplackal, chairperson of the Indian Farmers' Movement, a Church-backed body based in southern Kerala state. The Church in Kerala had opposed the order and appealed to the federal and provincial governments to seek a review as it would have affected millions of farmers, who live near protected forests.



Christian leaders come together for peace in Papua

(27-4-23) In a rare gesture, Catholic and Protestant leaders in Papua have come together to appeal to Indonesian President Joko Widodo to stop military operations in the crisis-hit province following the latest move to implement a 'combat alert operation.'

Bishop Yanuarius Theofilus Matopai You of Jayapura said, "We don't want any civilian casualties." "Therefore, we respectfully ask the President of the Republic of Indonesia to withdraw troops and take steps for negotiations and a humanitarian approach," Bishop You said

at a press conference on April 26 along with other Christian leaders.

This is the first time the Catholic Church has joined hands with Protestant leaders against the military build-up in Papua which intensified in recent months.

28-4-23

Pope pays tribute to the religious vocation of brother

(28-4-23) In a recent address to the Diocesan Oblate Brothers of Milan, Pope Francis said that "for me, the occasions in which I can meet consecrated brothers are precious: it is a witness of the value of this presence in the Church, which deserves to be rediscovered."

"Therefore, I thank you and I encourage you, because you are a sign, small but important, I would say indispensable, in the mosaic of vocations in the Church," he continued.

Be close to God, fellow bishops, priests, and people, Pope tells Mexico's bishops

(28-4-23) Pope Francis received 39 bishops from Mexico on April 27—the first of three groups of Mexican bishops travelling to Rome for their *ad limina* visits (ordinarily once in five years).

Over the years, a backlog of visits has developed—in part because of Covid—and the 2023 *ad limina* visits are the first for Mexico's bishops since 2014.

According to Spanish-language reports from Vatican News and the Mexican Episcopal Conference, the Pope's "central message" to the bishops was to bear hope and to be close to the people. The Pontiff also spoke of a fourfold closeness: to God, to fellow bishops, to priests, and to the people.

Papal praise for Billings Method 'revolution'

(28-4-23) Pope Francis remarked that the Billings Method of natural family planning, which at first was criticized as less reliable than contraceptives, has "continued to prove timely and challenging," not only for its effectiveness in spacing pregnancies but also for "an ability to cherish the fruitfulness of love even when not fertile, the building up of a culture that welcomes life and ways to confront the problem of demographic collapse."



The Pope made these points in a message to participants in a conference on the "Billings Revolution." He said that the power of the Billings message "has not diminished" in the 70 years since it was introduced. "Another dimension of sexuality," the Pope said, "no less challenging in our time, is precisely its relationship with procreation."

Priest kidnapped in Nigeria

(28-4-23) "One of our priests, Fr. Michael Ifeanyi Asomugha, was kidnapped on the evening of Saturday, April 15, 2023," the chancellor of the Diocese of Okigwe (Nigeria) said in an April 27 statement.

Okigwe is located in Imo State. The chancellor's statement did not refer to a motive for the abduction.

China - On the 10th anniversary of his death: Diocese of Shanghai commemorates Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian

(28-4-23) More than a thousand people filled the cathedral of the diocese of Shanghai on 27 April to commemorate Jesuit bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian, who died ten years ago, on April 27, 2013. During the solemn memorial Mass, presided over by Bishop Joseph Shen Bin and concelebrated by about sixty priests of the diocese, the emotion was palpable among those present (including more than seventy nuns) who came to bear witness to their grateful memory towards Bishop Jin and his contribution to the journey of the Church in Shanghai. In his homily, Bishop Shen Bin dwelt on Bishop Jin's tireless work to revive the life of the diocese. "I invite all priests and lay faithful in the diocese", Bishop Joseph Shen said "to learn from him the devotion of the faith, love of the country and of the Church, the spirit of unity and cohesion. We must assume our responsibility, take charge of the mission to which we are called and work together to open new paths for the proclamation of the Gospel and pastoral work in the diocese of Shanghai", following in the footsteps of Bishop Aloysius Jin.

Aged 97, Bishop Jin died of pancreatic cancer ten years ago. His long life on earth had covered all the most intimate events of the unparalleled adventure experienced by the Church in China in recent decades.

Brazil - A common project of national reconciliation: "hope is our courage!"

(28-4-23) "We ask all of Brazilian society to build a vast project of reconciliation and peace, based on frank and open dialogue, which allows us to overcome what separates us, with the aim of guaranteeing what unites us: the country, its people and creation". This is the invitation launched by the Brazilian Bishops, gathered in Aparecida for their 60th General Assembly in their traditional message to the Brazilian people.

The Bishops underline the climate of communion of these days - "what unites us is Christ" - and reaffirm their "radical and unconditional" commitment to the integral defense of life which manifests itself in every human being and in all creation. This is happening at a time marked by great challenges: "Our communities are responding, with fraternal solidarity, to the consequences of socio-

environmental tragedies; with the commitment of citizens to the defence of democracy and, with social responsibility, to the tragedy of hunger that afflicts us. With joy, we recognize, it is the authentic and effective witness that the world needs, in the light of the Word of God".

China's arrest of Taiwanese publisher sparks uproar

(28-4-23) China's Communist regime confirmed the detention of a Taiwan-based publisher over the alleged publication of books critical of Chinese policies and history leading to a war of words with Taiwan on China's controversial "long-arm jurisdiction."

Zhu Fenlian, spokesperson for the Taiwan Affairs Office of China's cabinet informed the press of the detention of Li Yanhe, a Taiwan citizen and publisher, at a press briefing on April 26 in Beijing, *Radio Free Asia* reported. "[Li] is suspected of engaging in activities that endangered national security," Zhu said. She further added that "the relevant parties will protect his legitimate rights and interests in accordance with the law."

Reportedly, Li had published non-fiction works on China's overseas infiltration and operations, the 1989 Tiananmen massacre, and other work critical of Beijing.



Fellowship created in late Indian priest's name

(28-4-23) Friends of Indian Jesuit Father Stan Swamy, a well-known rights activist who died in prison in 2021, have instituted a fellowship in his name.

The fellowship, a joint initiative of Swamy's friends and Bagaicha, a Jesuit-run social organization founded by the late priest, is to keep alive his legacy of working for the rights of indigenous people.

"The Stan Swamy Fellowship is meant for rights defenders working in rural areas without any institutional support to protect the rights of women, indigenous people, Dalits [former untouchables], and

displaced persons," said Bagaicha director, Father P. M. Antony. The one-year-long fellowship pays a monthly stipend of 15,000 rupees (US\$183). "Right now, we have the funds to support one candidate," Fr Antony told UCA News on April 28. "We are seeking crowd-funding and will increase the number of beneficiaries," the priest added. "Our objective is to keep the legacy of Father Swamy alive to benefit the same people for whom he died as a prisoner," the priest observed.

The scholarship was announced on April 26 — the 86th birthday of the late priest — at Namkum on the outskirts of Ranchi, the capital of India's eastern Jharkhand state, which is known for its tribal population.

Indian Catholic priest gets bail in sexual abuse case

(28-4-23) A Catholic priest in a southern Indian state has been granted bail after he was remanded in custody for over a month for allegedly sexually abusing a teenage student and four other women.

A local court in Nagercoil, in Tamil Nadu's Kanniyakumari district, granted conditional bail to Father Benedict Anto, a member of Marthandam diocese of the eastern rite Syro-Malankara Church, on April 24.

"The diocese suspended the priest soon after police acted against him," Father S Varghese, the vicar-general of the diocese, told UCA News on April 27. "He has been restrained from exercising his priestly ministry," Father Varghese added. The diocese, according to Father Varghese, "has not launched an internal probe against Father Anto as he is already facing a police inquiry."

29-4-23

Hong Kong – Bishop Stephen Chow – Love for our country is part of the Catholic Church's teaching

(29-4-23) Love for one's country "is part of the teachings of the Catholic Church", and in the present situation experienced by Catholics in mainland China and Hong Kong it is appropriate and convenient to

pray that the Holy Spirit "teach us to love our country and our Church at the same time", writes the Bishop of Hong Kong, the Jesuit Stephen Chow Sau-yan, in a speech published in the diocesan weekly *The Sunday Examiner* to present some considerations on his recent visit to the diocese of Beijing. "My trip to Beijing taught me to appreciate ecclesiastical and governmental personnel in the light of a common humanity eager for goals that favour greater understanding and collaboration".

His words had aroused conflicting and even controversial comments, relaunched through social networks. Bishop Chow continues his speech by noting that the greatest wealth of a country is "Without a doubt its people. So, loving one's country means loving those who live in the country, especially its citizens and residents." Similarly, the greatest asset of the Church is not "ecclesiastical buildings, but the People of God". So, if you don't want to be abstract, you should recognize that "loving our country means that the dignity of its people should come first. I believe that any responsible government must have the same mission in mind, although the prescribed approaches may vary due to various external factors". It is desirable that there be an openness to dialogue between the government and the Church. For the good of the country, we should help the government improve."

POPE'S THREE-DAY VISIT TO BUDAPEST (HUNGARY) - 28, 29, 30 APRIL 2023

28-4-23 Friday

Arriving in Hungary on April 28 to begin the 41st foreign visit of his pontificate, Pope Francis placed a heavy **emphasis on European unity**—a delicate subject, in light of tensions between Hungary and other European nations. This visit was to fulfil his 2021 promise (at the Eucharistic Congress) that he would come another time and spend more time with the Hungarians.

Many people, including groups of school children, some in pink hats, all waving and excited to see the Holy Father, lined the streets to welcome him. The State even offered free public transportation to anyone registered for the Pope's public events.

In an address to Hungarian **political leaders**, gathered in a former Carmelite monastery in Budapest, the Pope said that in the aftermath of World War II, European unity reflected "the noble hope that, by working together for a closer bond between nations, further conflicts could be avoided."

The papal address was a challenge to Hungary's political leadership, which has capitalized on national pride and resisted mass immigration.

Pope Francis' message on Friday to Hungarian **Church leaders** – bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated women and men, seminarians, and pastoral workers – focused on the centrality of the Risen Christ, who is "indeed our future." The Pope called for "the grace of discernment," to enable us to approach our own times with openness and a "prophetic spirit". He invited Church leaders in Hungary, and all the faithful of the country, to be welcoming, to bear witness to the prophetic message of the Gospel, and above all, to be men and women of prayer "because the future depends on this."



29-4-23 Saturday



The Holy Father's first event of the day was a moving **private encounter with the blind and disabled children** being cared for at the Church-run Blessed László Batthyány-Strattmann Institute. One could feel that the Pope's arrival for the children was "a little like Christmas."

After that visit, Pope Francis travelled to St. Elizabeth Church where he told **the refugees and poor people** gathered there of God's great love for them. After listening to some of their moving testimonies, he

expressed his closeness to those brothers and sisters who are suffering and perhaps are also on the move, including a Ukrainian family, and reminded the Church to create a space of encounter and to speak the "language of charity." After meeting the migrants and refugees, the Holy Father travelled to the nearby Protection of the Mother of God Church, which serves **the Catholic faithful of the Byzantine rite.**

After his morning appointments, Pope Francis held a "cordial" meeting at the Apostolic Nunciature with **the Russian Orthodox Metropolitan Archbishop of Budapest and Hungary**, who previously served as the head of the Department of External Relations of the Patriarchate of Moscow.

In the last public event of the second day of his Apostolic Journey to Hungary, Pope Francis

encouraged youths to "aim high" overcoming their fears and stepping dialoguing with Jesus, their best friend. Some 12,000 young people were present.

After the final papal event of the journey, he met privately his **Jesuit confreres** at the Apostolic Nunciature, where he was residing in Budapest.



in their lives, forward, always friend and brother. overjoyed to welcome

him on the day, the Jesuit Pope at the Apostolic Nunciature during his time in

30-4-23 Sunday

Pope Francis began his third and final day in Budapest with **the celebration of Holy Mass with tens of thousands of faithful** gathered in Kossuth Lajos Square in central Budapest.

The Holy Father based his homily on the Gospel reading for the Fourth Sunday of Easter, which focuses on the figure of the Good Shepherd. **A good shepherd, he said, "gives his life for his sheep."** "Jesus, like a shepherd who goes in search of his flock, came to find us when we were lost," he said. "Like a shepherd, He came to snatch us from death." Christ, the Good Shepherd, does two things in particular for His sheep, the Pope continued: He calls His sheep by name, and He leads them out.



Pope Francis implored the faithful, "Please, let us open those doors! Let us try to be, in our words, deeds, and daily activities, like Jesus, an open door, a door that is never shut in anyone's face, a door that enables everyone to enter and experience the beauty of God's love."

Praying the **Regina Coeli** at the conclusion of Mass in Budapest, Pope Francis thanked the authorities and people of Hungary for their warm welcome, and **prayed for peace across the European continent, especially in neighboring Ukraine.** He expressed his

hopes that the Church in Europe might find in Mary "strength in prayer, renewed humility and obedience, and be an example of convincing witness and joyful proclamation."

Pope Francis addressed **Hungary's academicians and scientists at the last public event of his Apostolic Visit**, and urged them to always be humble and recall that knowledge is truth and that truth is freedom. He explained that "they feel the duty to remain open and communicative, never unbending and combative. True lovers of culture, in fact, never feel entirely satisfied; they always experience a healthy interior restlessness."
