

CATHOLIC WORLD LAST WEEK

(CWLW)

13-19 Feb 2023

13-2-23



Cardinal Bo renews call for peace in Myanmar

(13-2-23) Myanmar's top churchman urged Catholics to hold firm to their faith and say prayers to the Virgin Mary amid suffering that has seen airstrikes, shelling and the burning of houses and churches by the army in recent months.

"We really need peace which is based on justice, and peace is possible," the 74-year-old cardinal Charles Bo the archbishop of Yangon said in his homily on the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes at the National Marian Shrine

of Nyaunglebin in Yangon Archdiocese. Thousands of Catholics attended the celebrations at Nyaunglebin, joined by Buddhists and Hindus, while others celebrated the feast day online due to pandemic restrictions and the political unrest that has raged since the military coup on February 1, 2021.

Around 1000 devotees, including internally displaced people, attended a Mass held at Christ the King Cathedral in Loikaw, capital of Christian majority Kayah State. In the evening, the devotees participated in a prayer program in the cathedral compound. "There was no gunfire or shelling so it was a relief for us to have our celebration with no disruptions," said one churchgoer, who did not wish to be named.

Catholic organisations hail 'victory for compassion and common sense'

(13-2-23) Catholic Religious Australia is among a number of Catholic organisations that have welcomed the Albanese Government's plan to end Temporary Protection Visas and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas.

More than 19,000 people with temporary refugee status will now be able to apply for a permanent Resolution of Status (RoS) visa, giving them the same rights as permanent residents.

Nicaraguan bishop sentenced to 26 years in prison

(13-2-23) Bishop Rolando Alvarez Lagos of Matagalpa, Nicaragua, has been sentenced to serve 26 years in prison for his public criticism of the Ortega regime.

The sentencing of Bishop Alvarez was announced the day after the Nicaraguan government allowed 222 political prisoners to fly to exile in the United States. The bishop refused to board the plane, choosing to remain in Nicaragua with his people. As part of his sentence, Bishop Alvarez was stripped of his Nicaraguan citizenship—perhaps in anticipation of his exile. Six clerics who had been arrested and charged with him were among the prisoners who were flown to the US.

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

'Let us not forget': papal appeal for earthquake victims, Ukraine

(13-2-23) "Let us continue to stay close, with prayer and concrete support, to the earthquake victims in Syria and Turkey," Pope Francis said to pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square for his February 12 Angelus address.

"I saw on the television program *A Sua Immagine* the images of this catastrophe, the pain of these peoples who are suffering as a result of the earthquake," the Pope continued, referring to an Italian public television show. "Let us pray for them, let us not forget them, let us pray and think about what

we can do for them." The Pope added, "And let us not forget tormented Ukraine: may the Lord open ways of peace and give those responsible the courage to follow them."

Pope: Sport can instill discipline and perseverance for spiritual life

(13-2-23) Pope Francis made his remarks in an address to managers and athletes of the Italian Federation of Modern Pentathlon.

Nun rape case: Kerala court acquits former Bishop Franco Mulakkal

(13-2-23) Bishop Franco Mulakkal has been acquitted in the nun rape and assault case by Kottayam Additional Court on 10 Feb. The court said the prosecution and police have failed to produce evidence against him.

Bishop Mulakkal, 57, was accused of raping the nun multiple times during his visit to a convent in this district when he was the Bishop of the Jalandhar diocese of the Catholic church.

The rape case against the Bishop was registered by police in Kottayam district in June, 2018.

In her complaint to the police in June 2018, the nun had alleged that she was subjected to sexual abuse by the bishop between 2014 and 2016.

The Special Investigation Team which probed the case, arrested the Bishop in September 2018 and charged him with wrongful confinement, rape, unnatural sex and criminal intimidation.

Bishop Mulakkal has not been given any new responsibilities in the Church.



Central Africa - The condition of Father Norberto Pozzi injured in a mine explosion

(13-2-23) "Father Norberto Pozzi is better they have taken him off the ventilator and now he is breathing on his own. They have just called me from the hospital in Entebbe", says from Bozoum to Fides Father Aurelio Gazzera, a confrere of the 71-year-old Carmelite missionary who was injured when a mine exploded on the Bozoum-Bocaranga highway, in the northwest of the Central African Republic. "On Friday afternoon, February 10, Father Norberto was on his way from Bozoum to Bouar when, some 22 km from Bozoum, the car he was traveling in hit a mine," says Father Gazzera.

"There were 5 other people, a French confrere and 4 Central African helpers in the Toyota Land Cruiser in addition to the Italian missionary. The confrere suffered minor injuries while a carpenter who is also a catechist suffered a fractured his shoulder". On 11 February, he was taken by a helicopter to the UN Force hospital.

(14-2-23) Unfortunately, after consulting both Claudio, a doctor, and father Norberto's brother, and Dr. Destro, from the Italian embassy in Kampala, it was decided that an amputation of the foot is necessary, says Fr Gazzera, who managed to reach Father Norbert. "I have spoken to him now and he is in a good mood", says Father Aurelius.

Nicaragua - Pope Francis: "Peace is born of truth, justice, freedom and love and is achieved through patient dialogue"

(13-2-23) "The news from Nicaragua has saddened me a great deal, and I cannot but remember with concern Bishop Rolando Álvarez of Matagalpa, whom I care about greatly, sentenced to 26 years imprisonment, and also those who have been deported to the United States. I pray for them and for all those who are suffering in that dear nation, and I ask for your prayers. We also ask the Lord, through the intercession of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, to open the hearts of political leaders and all citizens sincerely seeking peace, which is born of truth, justice, freedom and love and is achieved through the patient exercise of dialogue", said Pope Francis after the Angelus on February 12.

'Fake' ordination scandal rocks Vietnamese diocese

(13-2-23) A Catholic bishop in Vietnam has disowned a priest ordained for his diocese in the Philippines when laypeople questioned the new priest's worthiness, saying that he was once jailed for bribery and not known to have trained in a seminary.

Bishop Alfonso Nguyen Huu Long of Vinh diocese in central Vietnam issued a statement on Feb. 10 disowning Father John Baptist Ho Huu Hoa, three months after he was ordained by Bishop Precioso D. Cantillas of Maasin in the Philippines.

Bishop Long said he was “surprised” by Hoa's ordination and asked him to “present the documents of his ordination so that he could celebrate sacraments validly, but so far I have not received any documents from him or Maasin diocese,” Bishop Long said in the statement.

A video of the Dec. 7 ordination ceremony that went viral on social media shows the priest chancellor of Maasin diocese reading out Bishop Long's dimissorial letter — a canonical document issued by a bishop to a person in his diocese so he can be ordained by another bishop.

The letter “is completely fake” Bishop Long's statement said adding that Hoa's ordination is “under investigation.” The priestly ordination of 38-year Hoa came just over a year after he was released from prison, according to local reports, which shows he could not have had the mandatory four years of theology training in a seminary.

Arson attack on Indian church sparks anger



(13-2-23) Christian leaders in India have deplored the burning of a Protestant church in a central Indian state, which has enacted a draconian anti-conversion law.

The interior of the church belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Madhya Pradesh was found badly burnt on Feb. 12. Its pastor, Mahesh Kumre, said: “We had our last prayer gathering on Feb. 5 and when we went to the church for prayers on Feb. 12 it

was found burnt from inside,” Pastor Kumre told UCA News on Feb. 13. The church, built six years ago, has a seating capacity of 1,000 people.

The perpetrators cut through a grill to secure entry and set on fire the Bible, prayer books, chairs, tables, fans, and donation box, he said. They inscribed the name of the Hindu lord Rama in Hindi where ‘Hail Jesus’ was written. The church is located in Narmadapuram district in Madhya Pradesh, ruled by the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party.

“It seems to be part of the same campaign against us on the alleged charges of religious conversion,” Father Maria Stephan, the Catholic Church's public relations officer in Madhya Pradesh, told UCA News on Feb. 13. The minority Christian community has been complaining of persecution by the right-wing Hindu groups on the alleged charges of religious conversion.

(15-2-23) Police have arrested three suspects who are all in their early twenties. “Police have returned the church key and told us to clean it; we will soon start our services,” Pastor Mahesh Kumre of the Evangelical Lutheran Church said.

Family seeks answers for Malaysia's missing pastor

(13-2-23) The family of Malaysian Anglican pastor Raymond Koh who went missing six years ago vowed not to rest until they find answers for his mysterious disappearance, the pastor's wife said. Koh's wife Suzanna Liew and other family members attended a vigil at the Council of Churches Malaysia in Petaling Jaya on Feb. 12, to mark the sixth anniversary of his abduction, the *Malay Mail* reported. “We do not have any updates; no news from the authorities and government,” Liew said in her speech. “However, we still hold on to hope.”

The case of Pastor Koh is one of several high-profile abduction cases in Malaysia in recent years. He was abducted after Islamic radical groups accused him of proselytizing among Muslims in Selangor state.

India's religious leaders hail drive against child marriage

(13-2-23) Religious leaders, including Christians, have hailed the move to curb child marriages in India's northeastern state of Assam, amid international agencies reporting millions of child marriages in India.

Police in the state of Assam launched a crackdown against child marriages on Feb. 3 and rounded up more than 3,000 people, including Hindu and Muslim priests who officiated the child marriages in the state, bordering Muslim-majority Bangladesh.

While appreciating the government action to eradicate child marriage, Bishop Albert Hemrom of Dibrugarh in Assam talking to UCA News on Feb.14 expressed his concern for people arrested and lodged in overcrowded prisons.

Three killed, nine wounded in Myanmar bomb blast

(13-2-23) Three people were killed and nine wounded in a bomb blast at a railway station in southern Myanmar on Monday 13 February, the junta and local media said.

The blast hit a station at Nyaungglaybin township in Bago region around 150 kilometers north of commercial hub Yangon at around 12:20 pm local time (0550 GMT), the junta's information team said in a statement. It released pictures showing debris and roof tiles littering a platform. Local media, citing residents, also reported three people had died and at least nine had been wounded. The junta statement blamed anti-coup "People's Defence Forces" (PDFs) for the attack, without offering evidence.

Papuan Catholics chip in with aid for quake victims

(13-2-23) Catholics in Indonesia's Papua province are collecting funds for those affected by the Feb. 9 earthquake in the capital Jayapura that left four people dead and more than 3,000 displaced.

In Agats-Asmat Diocese in South Papua, Franciscan Bishop Aloysius Murwito led a joint rally and a prayer meeting for the victims on Feb. 12 evening at the Yos Sudarso open field in the district capital of Asmat. Bishop Murwito invited people to pray for the victims and show solidarity by providing assistance. The event raised a total of 16,720,000 rupiah (US\$1,097).

14-2-23

Pope Francis: Health services should not discriminate against those with rare diseases

(14-2-23) "It is a question of fighting so that no one is excluded from the health service, no one is discriminated against, no one is penalized—and this, starting from an experience like yours that is strongly at risk of marginalization," Pope Francis said in a February 13 address to a delegation from the Italian Federation for Rare Diseases (UNIAMO).

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

(14-2-23) Faced with the worsening social and political situation in Nicaragua, and following the expulsion from the country of more than 220 opponents of President Daniel Ortega's regime and the sentencing of Bishop Rolando Álvarez to more than 26 years in prison, several episcopates from around the world, like, the Episcopal Council of Latin America (CELAM), have reacted with concern for, and solidarity with, the citizens and the Catholic Church in that country.

The Bishops of Chile have also raised their voices, reacting in particular to the Nicaraguan court ruling against Bishop Rolando Álvarez. Through their website, the Spanish bishops also issued a statement expressing their sorrow and concern for "the bishops of the Nicaraguan Episcopal Conference who are suffering persecution by the government for defending the freedom of Nicaraguans."



Christianity is a force for peace in Sudan, Vatican diplomat emphasizes

(14-2-23) Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, apostolic nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, said that "at a time when attempts are often made to blame religion for the various conflicts within our human family, the case of South Sudan shows that Christianity is a force for peace, since it encourages conversion and the exercise of virtue."

“This force is especially amplified when Christians act ecumenically, demonstrating that distinct faith communities can unite in love despite differences,” the archbishop added as he addressed a recent meeting of UN ambassadors.

Archbishop Caccia acknowledged that “the peace process in South Sudan continues to experience difficulties ... In the face of these challenges, the Holy See hopes that civil leaders of South Sudan accelerate efforts to promote transparency, advance democratic norms and the rule of law and ensure that revenues from South Sudan’s abundant natural resources go towards meeting the basic needs of all citizens.”

Bishop Cui Tai: 16 years of arrests and releases, faithful call for an end to illegal detention



(14-2-23) Since 2007, for almost 16 years, Bishop Augustine Cui Tai of the diocese of Xuanhua (Hebei) has been illegally detained by the authorities without any grounds or legal procedure.

In recent years, the authorities granted the bishop short visits to his elderly relatives every Spring Festival (Lunar New Year) or Mid-Autumn. Since the cleric was taken away in spring 2021, however, he has not returned home, and the faithful have no way of knowing anything about his welfare or whereabouts.

Bishop Cui, 71, is recognised by the Holy See, but not by the Chinese government.

In early 2013, after consultation and careful verification by the Vatican, Pope Benedict XVI approved and appointed Msgr Cui as auxiliary bishop of the Xuanhua diocese. The following April he was ordained coadjutor bishop, but then Bishop Thomas (Cathedral) Zhao Kexun, the ordinary bishop, entrusted him with full authority to run the diocese.

In 2018, Bishop Zhao passed away in his hiding place at the age of 94 due to old age and physical decline. According to canon law, Bishop Cui automatically became ordinary bishop of the diocese. *AsiaNews* sources note that this year coincides with the 10th anniversary of Msgr Cui’s episcopal ordination. The faithful of the diocese miss the pastor who is in prison and, although they cannot hear from the bishop, they sincerely pray every day for his salvation, hoping that he will return among them as soon as possible.

Filipino Catholic couples feed orphans on Valentine’s Day

(14-2-23) Filipino Catholic couples from a global Catholic lay movement visited 12 orphanages and offered food to children on Valentine’s Day, Feb. 14.

A total of 123 members of Couples for Christ, an international Catholic lay movement focused on renewing Catholic values in the family, paid visits to abandoned children as part of their ongoing program for the family.

Italy - "Missionary volunteering as a vocational path": Living Baptism as a gift from God

(14-2-23) The seven formation and animation meetings of the General Sector of the Missions of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA) have just ended, aimed at the provincial coordinators and missionaries *ad gentes* of the world. "To strengthen or undertake paths that promote missionary volunteering means rediscovering how important it is to 'be there' as FMA, lay men and women called to live Baptism as a gift and response to God who makes us feel his love and pushes us to come out of ourselves, to meet the other to find together the meaning of life in Jesus". With these words Sister Ruth del Pilar Mora, General Councilor for the Missions, invited the sisters of the General Missions Sector and the members of the Global Missio Team to reflect on the theme of the meetings held online February, 10 to 12, 2023.

Niger - Basic Christian communities, a simple tool for proclaiming the Gospel

(14-2-23) "I would like to tell you about our basic Christian communities which, it seems, normally operate in all the missions of the diocese except in Dosso", writes Father Rafael Casamayor from Niger. "We left last year with great commitment and determination. Every fortnight a group of

Christians from a village meet in one of their homes to pray, read the Gospel and simply pray, commenting, exchanging ideas, experiences, talking about Christian life, supporting each other in a Muslim society that generally does not make it easy to express oneself".

"It is not an easy path, since we all have very different points of view - adds the priest of the Society for African Missions - but we are slowly managing to 'break the ice'. People seem happy to be able to exchange viewpoints, sharing and being in each other's company".

The diocese of Niamey has created "basic Christian communities" (CCB) as a method and instrument of evangelization and organization of parish life. "In Dosso there are five and they correspond to as many sectors of the city. The diocese has been doing this for a few years," says Father Casamayor.

Venezuela - Apostolic Vicariate of Caroní: 100 years, "An exciting mission"

(14-2-23) "In these first hundred years since the canonical establishment of the Apostolic Vicariate of Caroní, the Capuchins have carried out a difficult and exciting mission. They have devoted almost a century to the pastoral care of our indigenous brothers and sisters", says Bishop Gonzalo Alfredo Ontivares Vivas, who has been Vicar Apostolic of Caroní for a year and a half and who provides pastoral care to the indigenous Pemòn people.

In particular, since July 2021 the Catholic Diocese of San Cristóbal has been collaborating with the Apostolic Vicariate of Caroní. A sign of growth and missionary maturity of the local Church, called to take charge of an ecclesiastical circumscription that the Venezuelan bishops have described as a "pioneering experience" on the occasion of the 100th anniversary.



Fiji Islands - The mission of the Bishops of Oceania: "to be communities of ever-closer followers of Jesus Christ"

(14-2-23) They entrusted themselves, for the mission of the Church in Oceania, to Saint Peter Chanel, Saint Mary of the Cross MacKillop, Saint Pedro Calungsod, and to Blessed Peter To Rot, Diego Luis de San Vitores, Jean-Baptiste Mazzucconi, asking for their intercession so that believers can "respond to the hopes and challenges they shared with a heart stretched out towards mission and service". This is how the bishops of the Federation of Episcopal Conferences of Oceania, gathered in Fiji for their general assembly, which takes place every four years, concluded their meeting.

It is reported that the bishops focused on three themes: Care for the oceans; Becoming a more synodal Church; and Formation for mission.

They discussed the working document for the continental phase of the Synod of Bishops on Synodality. "Guided by the voices of the People of God in Oceania, we progressed the work already undertaken to ensure a distinctively Oceanic voice will continue to resonate through the Synod documents," they wrote, announcing that the Final Document, in its definitive version, will be published in the coming weeks.

Filipino Catholic couples feed orphans on Valentine's Day

(14-2-23) Filipino Catholic couples from a global Catholic lay movement visited 12 orphanages and offered food to children on Valentine's Day, Feb. 14.

A total of 123 members of Couples for Christ, an international Catholic lay movement, focused on renewing Catholic values in the family, through activities and programmes, paid visits to abandoned children as part of their ongoing program for the family.

The members visited 12 orphanages that house about 500 kids, including victims of trafficking and abuse. They offered the children fried chicken and spaghetti.

Indian nun survives train mishap, continues to save runaway kids



Sr Ambika Pillai, back row, 3rd from right

(14-2-23) Sister Ambika Pillai, a member of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Garden, is a founding member and the secretary of Navjeevan (New Life) Children's Home in Khandwa, a town in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh.

The children at the centre mostly come from broken families -- typically abandoned or orphaned -- who end up loitering around train stations; oftentimes, their fathers were addicted to drugs and their mothers were unable to make enough money to support their families. She walks with the help of a crutch and a prosthetic leg thanks to a train accident that made her lose a leg. The accident happened six years ago even as she was

moving around in trains looking for abandoned or run-away children. Through a hard discernment she concluded that if she was kept alive, it must be to re-dedicate her life with greater zest to give life to these children.

In August 2022, she resumed her work as the secretary of the children's home with the additional responsibility of being the superior of the local six-member community. The nun and her team teach the children art, craft, basic computers and etiquette in addition to helping them with their daily school classes. "It is a round-the-clock job, as we have to monitor them every moment," Sister Pillai said, adding that the children often come to the centre with psychological issues.

Sister Pillai said it was love for children that prompted her to work on the streets and railways because that's where children often become victims of exploitation and abuse, she stresses. Though her activities are now reduced, "But I can help them (the children) and their families through counselling," she emphasizes, which mainly focuses on reuniting broken families, drug addiction among men, and women's various issues. To help her in this work she has enrolled herself in a master of science course in applied psychology with a specialization in counseling and psychotherapy – in addition to her master's degree in social work, diplomas in counseling, psychology and family counseling from different universities.

Sister Pillai and her team have so far supported more than 600 boys until they turned 18, the legal age limit to stay in a care home. They send the girls to a government centre in the city. The sister's centre now has 24 boys, who study in government and private schools.

Sister Pillai, who was born in a Hindu family in the southwestern Indian state of Kerala, said even her vocation to Catholic religious life had come with great difficulties. A chance encounter with a Catholic priest, who was approached to cure her mother who would behave as if possessed, led her whole family to become Catholic. Under the pretext of pursuing her studies, he was allowed to stay in a convent and later, after her studies, and in spite of opposition from the family, she embraced religious life.

15-2-23

Pope describes three languages of evangelization

(15-2-23) Evangelization is done in three languages, Pope Francis told his weekly General Audience on February 15: "the language of thought, the language of affection, and the language of work."

Here below is the summary of his discourse:

In our continuing catechesis on apostolic zeal, the desire to share with others the joy of the Gospel, we now consider the calling of the twelve apostles, whom Jesus chose "to be with him and to be sent out to proclaim the Good News" (Mk 3:14). Both aspects of that call are essential, for only by closeness to Jesus do we learn to proclaim him and not ourselves, his word and not our own. As Jesus sends the apostles forth on mission, he tells them to share the gift that they themselves received, the unmerited gift of God's redeeming love. Their message must be his own: that the

kingdom of God is at hand and requires only that we receive it with open hearts. Jesus also tells the apostles that they are sent forth like sheep among wolves, to propose the Gospel above all by their witness of meekness, innocence and personal conviction, proclaiming Christ more by their actions than by their words. The Church, as “apostolic”, is entirely missionary; each of us, in Baptism, is called by Jesus to live in closeness to him and to be sent forth, in union with all our brothers and sisters, to bear witness to his Gospel before the world.

Vatican releases ‘Our Common Home: A guide to caring for our living planet’

(15-2-23) The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development has released *Our Common Home: A guide to caring for our living planet*.

The 11-page booklet, according to its introduction, “is the result of a collaboration between the scientific and spiritual communities, between the Stockholm Environment Institute and the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. It sets out essential facts and solutions on key topics, along with advice on how communities can respond.”

Pope appoints lay commissioners to oversee Rome diocese

(15-2-23) Pope Francis has named six members to a new commission that will supervise the legal and financial affairs of the Diocese of Rome, following up on the January *motu proprio* with which he reorganized the administration of the diocese, tightening his own control.

Beatification set for entire family killed by Nazis

(15-2-23) The Vatican has announced September 10 as the date for the beatification of an entire Polish family. Jozef and Wiktoria Ulman were executed, along with their children, by the Nazi regime for hiding a Jewish family in their home in Markowa. The couple and their seven children—one unborn—will be beatified together. The ceremony will take place in Markowa.



Two Dominican priests laicized in Congo

(15-2-23) The Vatican has dismissed two Dominican priests in the Democratic Republic of Congo from the clerical state, for refusing to obey orders to leave a parish.

The two priests were involved in a dispute over administration of a parish in the Kinshasa archdiocese. While the Dominican order claimed title to the parish grounds (a claim that was contested), the archdiocese had appointed another priest as pastor.

Atlanta airport gets a 24/7 Eucharistic chapel

(15-2-23) On February 12, Archbishop Gregory Hartmayer of Atlanta dedicated a new chapel at the world’s busiest airport. Mass is offered there on Saturday and Sunday at 4:30 PM, and deacons hold Communion services on Thursday and Friday mornings.

Dublin archdiocese seeks to delist dozens of churches, parish centres from new tax

(15-2-23) The Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin has made dozens of submissions to the city council seeking to delist as many as 32 churches and parish centres from a new tax that is supposed to spur house-building on vacant land.

The properties on the council’s list include a large number of chapels in the city and suburbs. Such properties and 29 other Dublin churches are among hundreds of sites designated for inclusion in the Residential Zones Land Tax in draft maps that the city council and other local authorities published in November.

The Government has been aiming to discourage land hoarding by imposing the new tax on property owners for unused land as it seeks solutions to the worsening housing crisis.

DR Congo - Catholic parish and hospital in Birambizo looted: vaccination campaign against measles ruined

(15-2-23) Among the buildings looted on February 13 by the M23 rebels in Birambizo, in the Bukombo group, Rutshuru territory, in North Kivu (eastern Democratic Republic of Congo), there is also the local Catholic parish.

In addition to the parish, the rebels systematically looted the Birambizo health center, which is the main health facility for the inhabitants of the area.

According to Radio Okapi (sponsored by the UN Mission in the DRC), it is the second consecutive time in a few days that the Birambizo hospital has been vandalized by rebels and their allies.

The assailants took everything: equipment, medicine, food, solar panels, even mattresses. "They spared nothing", says a hospital source.

Particularly serious is the theft of solar panels used to power refrigerators intended to store vaccines. Some 6,000 doses of measles vaccines have gone to waste as health workers prepared to carry out the measles vaccination campaign in and around the Birambizo health area.

Patients in health centers had to leave their beds to avoid further trauma.



Togo - Small hospital in the suburbs of an indigenous religious institute at the service of the population

(15-2-23) The 'Msgr. Joseph Strebler', is a small field hospital belonging to the Sisters of Our Lady of the Church (NDE), an indigenous religious institute founded on August 15, 1952 in Noépé, Togo, by the then Apostolic Vicar of Lomé Joseph Strebler (SMA).

"We are in the large suburbs towards Benin, in the Adamavo Baguida neighborhood, where there is a parish entrusted to the fathers of the Society for African Missions - writes Father Silvano

Galli, a missionary in Lomé. The hospital is located a few blocks from the Church and offers a series of basic services. In addition to routine check-ups - he explains - the center offers assistance to patients with HIV, all nursing and microsurgery services. Inside there is also a laboratory where all kinds of blood tests are carried out, a bacteriological unit, a rehabilitation centre and a pharmacy".

The most common diseases are malaria, anemia, gastroenteritis, digestive parasitosis, dermatoses, articular rheumatism, traumatic ulcers and neonatal infections. There are also 150 prenatal visits per month. Births are 40/45 per month.

Bangladesh - Christians help earthquake victims in Turkey and Syria

(15-2-23) Having the experience of typhoons, floods and natural disasters, the Catholics of Bangladesh, hearing about the immense devastation caused by the earthquake in the Middle East, wanted to "return the aid received" and make their own small contribution. At the Mass on Sunday 12 February, an appeal for donations was launched in all the parishes and dioceses of the country, and numerous communities prayed for the victims and their families, who entrusted the wounded to the Lord and organized an extraordinary collection to be sent to the Churches in the affected countries.

A fundraising campaign was also launched at the "Uttorbanga Christian Bohumukhi Samabay Samity", a small financial institution in Bangladesh run by the Christian Tarcisius Palma. The Bangladesh government has also sent a team of 51 people, including soldiers, firefighters and civil defence, to help with the relief efforts. The Bangladeshi delegation is providing 12,000 tents, 10,000 blankets and tons of food aid to the people of Turkey and Syria.

Nordic cross desecrated during protests in Pakistan

(15-2-23) Some Muslims in Pakistan have publicly insulted the cross on the Norwegian flag in their continued retaliation against the recent desecration of the Quran by far-right activists in Europe. Members of Pakistan's far-right Islamic extremist political party Tehreek-e-Labbiak (TLP) organized the protest on a public road in Faisalabad city in eastern Punjab province on Feb. 13. In a video

circulating on social media, a man is seen slamming his shoes on the Norwegian flag lying on a street while another rides his motorcycle on it. The protestors can be heard chanting “Labaik Ya Rasool Allah (We are present O’ messenger of Allah).”

Christians have condemned the burning of copies of the Quran in Sweden and the Netherlands but also expressed concern over the provocative methods adopted by Islamist mobs in Pakistan.

Korea’s Church-run soup kitchens struggle amid price hike

(15-2-23) Church-run soup kitchens in South Korea that offer free food to hundreds of hungry and homeless people are struggling to operate due to price hikes of daily essentials and the high cost of utilities such as gas, says a report. Amid the crisis, the free soup kitchens that receive subsidies from the government are on the better side, and church-run facilities that solely depend on donations from Catholics are facing difficulties, *Catholic Times* reported on Feb. 15.

Cheonan St. Mary’s House, a free meal service for hundreds of people run by the Daejeon Diocese, continues to provide free meals with subsidies and operating expenses supported by the district office and parish. However, due to the sharp increase in food material purchase and gas costs, the facility has been facing a hard time.

Thomas House in Yeongdeungpo, Seoul, is under severe financial pressure as it provides free meals to the homeless and the elderly living alone in the Yeongdeungpo area with only individual and group donations, from Monday to Friday. Each day about 300 people get free lunches from the facility, but it does not receive any support from the government.

A church source confirmed each of the three Catholic archdioceses and 14 dioceses and various religious organizations run such free meal services across the country.



Macau’s Catholic university uses radio to combat hunger

(15-2-23) The Church-run University of St. Joseph (USJ) in Macau has joined a global radio project that aims to combat hunger and food insecurity through multidisciplinary analysis by experts and knowledge sharing in Portuguese-speaking countries and territories.

The USJ has partnered with the University of São Paulo (USP) of Brazil in a pioneering Portuguese-language web radio project to combat hunger and food insecurity, Macau’s Portuguese Catholic weekly, *Jornal O-Clarim*, reported on Feb. 10.

16-2-23

Resignation ‘has not crossed my mind,’ Pope says

(16-2-23) Pope Francis said that resignation “has not crossed my mind,” and added that he thinks a Pontiff should serve for life, at a February 2 meeting with Jesuits in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Pope said that although Pope Benedict XVI “had the courage to do it” because of declining health, “this does not at all mean that resigning Popes should become, let’s say, a fashion, a normal thing.” He said that “I believe that a Pope’s ministry is for life.”

At the same meeting, the Pontiff told the Jesuits in the Congo that while their country is torn by a bloody conflict, “the whole world is at war.” He went on to say that “the main problem is the production of weapons.”

In a separate meeting on February 4 with Jesuits in South Sudan, the Pope answered a query about his spiritual life, saying that in addition to celebrating Mass and the Divine Office, he “sometimes prays the Rosary and sometimes prays while meditating on the Gospel.”

Dutch cardinal moves to curtail ‘priestless Sunday’ celebrations

(16-2-23) Cardinal Willem Eijk of Utrecht has announced plans to cut down on the number of “Word and Communion” services held on Sunday at parishes without a priest.

The cardinal explained in a pastoral letter: “It is my hope that in this way the celebration of the Eucharist will regain more of its central place.” Toward the same end, Cardinal Eijk has planned a massive consolidation of parishes into larger communities where the Eucharist is celebrated. He is committed to ending “priestless Sundays” in the archdiocese, where—as throughout the Netherlands—the number of Catholics attending Sunday Mass has fallen steadily.

English pro-lifers ‘not guilty’ for prayer outside abortion clinics

(16-2-23) Isabel Vaughan-Spruce and Father Sean Gough have been acquitted of all charges for praying outside English abortion clinics.

In separate incidents, the two had been arrested for violation of a rule against “protesting and engaging in an act that is intimidating to service users” at abortion clinics. In both cases the pro-life activists had been silent, but were arrested on suspicion that they were praying.

Bolivian archbishop sees government bid to intimidate Church leaders

(16-2-23) Archbishop Percy criticized Bolivia’s attorney bishops to testify about their Presidential term that year, in had banned a fourth term. marked by charges of fraud—and eventually Morales left decried the popular protests, the victim of a coup.



Galvan of La Paz has general for calling Catholic role in the 2019 ouster of Morales ran for a fourth violation of a referendum that His re-election—in voting triggered nationwide unrest, the country. His supporters saying that Morales had been Archbishop Galvan said that

the bishops responded to the crisis by seeking to restore peace. He pointed out that in the aftermath of the contested election, “the police had mutinied, the Army was confined to their barracks, we were totally unprotected. We had to do something.”

Partners in mission: Vatican dicastery promotes ‘co-responsibility’ of clergy, laity

(16-2-23) The Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life has organized a three-day conference, “Pastors and lay faithful called to walk together” (Italian-language links).

Cardinal Gérald Lacroix of Quebec and Cardinal Kevin Farrell (the Dicastery’s prefect) warned against a reductive vision of the laity that limits the lay vocation to assisting in parish and diocesan life. On the other hand, Linda Ghisoni, the Dicastery’s undersecretary, spoke of the importance of “shared processes, including shared decision-making processes.”

Nigerian think tank builds ‘atrocities database’ documenting persecution of Christians

(16-2-23) A Nigerian research centre has built a database which tracks how thousands of Christians in northern Nigeria have faced displacement, kidnapping, or death, with little government attention or response to the problem.

Organized and compiled by the Kukah Centre of Abuja, the “Nigerian Atrocities Documentation Project” aims to compile evidence-based data into “an atrocities’ database” recording Christian persecution in northern Nigeria.

Freed Nicaraguan political prisoner tells how faith sustained him in prison

(16-2-23) “I knew that I had Jesus with me,” Felix Maradiaga, a Catholic and former Nicaraguan presidential candidate, said of his time in a Nicaraguan prison. Maradiaga was one of 222 Nicaraguan political prisoners exiled to the United States last week—and subsequently rendered stateless.

Papal welcome for United Bible Societies

(16-2-23) Pope Francis praised the “commendable work” of the United Bible Societies, at a February 16 private audience with leaders of the group.

“The nascent Church lives by the Word, proclaims it and, persecuted, flees with it as its only baggage,” the Pope remarked.

‘The world of work is undergoing a serious crisis,’ Vatican diplomat warns

(16-2-23) Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, apostolic nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, addressed a UN session on work.

“A renewed ethics of the common good and respect for the inherent and transcendent dignity of every human person are necessary to reshape labour markets in a way that promotes both economic growth and integral human development,” he said. “The recognition that the human person is the measure of the dignity of work should form the basis for policy-making capable of both tackling the structural inequalities of today’s global economy and restoring the authentic meaning of work.”

Cameroon bishop denounces killings of workers amid separatist push

(16-2-23) The Central African nation of 28.5 million is 61% Christian (and 29% Catholic), 20% Muslim, and 18% ethnic religionist. The Anglophone crisis began in 2017 and has displaced over 700,000 people.

Central Africa - A musician 'trapped' in the body of a nurse: Father Camorani between missionary work and healthcare

(16-2-23) "Here, in my small, modest, but dignified village hospital, the care of the body and the care of the soul come together", writes to Fides Father Davide Camorani, who arrived in Central Africa on September 21, 2021 in the mission of Monassao, diocese of Berberati.

"Here, although I am not a crowd pleaser or a talented speaker, I manage to be a priest, a nurse, a doctor. Being here I discovered, after so many questions about what I was going to do and what I was going to become, that the secret lies in doing one's work with love, that is, paying attention to the person and not just the disease".

"In the parish of Monassao, where I am, among the Pygmies, who are called Bayaka here, healthcare work occupies a large part of my time. The most significant part of my work, the part that puts me in daily contact with people and also allows me to accompany staff more closely, not giving orders but working alongside them, sees me engaged above all in improving the quality of service, creating tools, organizing work, empowering staff so that they learn to work in an orderly and methodical way. These are all things that, in our nursing education, were instilled in us from the very beginning and have become part, not only of my way of working, but also of my way of thinking. The other aspect is direct care and nursing. Here the doctor is a rare beast found only in the larger hospitals," highlights Father David.

"Once someone asked me whether I felt more like a nurse or more of a musician, I replied that I am a musician trapped in the body of a nurse," concludes the priest of the Society for African Missions. Now I am a musician, nurse and priest, in a single body, in which these three aspects of my person blend harmoniously."



Mozambique - Is ISIS Mozambique now hitting only military targets? In any case, civilians are also affected

(16-2-23) Change of strategy by ISIS-Mozambique? This is what one wonders after the latest attacks carried out by the jihadist group against military and government targets that spared the inhabitants of the affected areas in the province of Cabo Delgado (northern Mozambique).

The latest attack dates back to February 13 in the village of Nairoto, Montepuez district. The local barracks were targeted. The group, composed of at least 30-40 elements if not as many as 100, struck around midnight. The five soldiers died in the assault, while several others were wounded. The

barracks were set on fire and several military vehicles were destroyed. The attackers managed to take possession of weapons and ammunition and other equipment taken from the soldiers. The fact that the local population was not vandalized is interpreted as a continuation of the new strategy of ISIS-Mozambique aimed at reconnecting with the local populations and spreading the idea that they are only fighting against the Mozambican military and security forces. This is not to say that the jihadists' actions are not impacting the province's economy.

Syria - Aleppo, Bishop Joseph Tobji: the earthquake opens a new time of trial, also for faith

(16-2-23) "After the shock and terror, we are now beginning to come to terms with the extent of the material and spiritual ruins that the earthquake has left in our lives. A hard time begins, where we will be called to confess and witness even in this situation that Our Father who is in heaven loves us and wants our salvation". Ten days after the earthquake that sowed death and destruction in a large region between Syria and Turkey, Joseph Tobji, Maronite Bishop of Aleppo, tells Fides about the many darkneses and few lights that mark the present and the future of his people. Faced with the new tragedy that has also overwhelmed the people from Aleppo, the Bishop takes charge of the many questions that also call faith into question.



"For those who do not have the gift of faith", the Bishop acknowledges, without reproaching anyone "what has happened can also increase resentment about their fate. There are those who keep asking: what is the next evil that will fall on our lives? We have had war, embargo, pandemic, now the earthquake... Why does all this happen to us? What have we done wrong?". Instead, others find comfort in the stories of so many dangers mysteriously escaped, stories that run from mouth to mouth, to mutual comfort. "In the face of the new tragedy enveloping the people," the bishop added, "we are called to repeat that evil is not absolute, and God wants our good. We are calling each family, each person, also to ask what they need. The works of charity that reach us, even from distant friends, are a sign of light and hope.

Vietnam - Priests at the service of the poor, of young people, of the care of the "Common Home" in small communities

(16-2-23) "To serve God through the poor, in whom Christ is present and to be close to them every day" is the desire of Peter Pham Minh Hung, a priest in the parish of Vuon Xoai, belonging to the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh Ville. In the parishes where he has provided pastoral service, the priest - tells Fides - has come into contact with people and families in conditions of poverty, especially in the parish of Thi Nghe. "Donating even just a portion of rice or basic necessities every month is a simple, but important gesture", he reports, noting that the recipients are people without distinction of ethnicity or religion. Furthermore, on the occasion of national holidays or special religious ceremonies, "it is a good practice to pay special attention to those in need, but often do not dare to ask and cannot fully experience the spirit of the celebration". In the parish of Saint Martin, also in the archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh Ville, every month about 100 poor families residing in the parish area were helped, both Christians and non-Christians. Father Peter Pham Minh Hung also paid special attention there to the disabled, inviting them every Sunday morning to come to church for breakfast and a moment of fraternity. the priest oversaw the opening of a sort of "cheap restaurant;" in just two months, the number of meals served daily rose to 700.

Report documents rampant Christian persecution in China

(16-2-23) Christians in China have continued to face various forms of persecution including sinicization, educational reforms, and widespread rights abuses coupled with stringent laws under the repressive regime of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), says a Christian rights watchdog.

The persecution of Christians in China was highlighted in the 63-page Annual Persecution Report 2022 by US-based China Aid released on Feb. 14. "In 2022, China Aid has felt day by day the CCP's escalated persecutions against Christian churches and Christians in mainland China, which explains why churches and Christians in China became increasingly afraid of exposing their lived persecution experiences to the outside world," the report read.

People including top brass CCP officials have engaged in promoting Sinicization among the Christians pressurizing them to yield to the political ideology and vision of President Xi Jinping, it stated.



Family seeks probe into alleged suicide of Indian priest

(16-2-23) The family of an Indian Catholic priest who is suspected to have committed suicide in October last year has sought an investigation alleging foul play in his death.

Father Kondru Velankani Raju, 33, who served as assistant parish priest of the St. Peter's Cathedral in Vijayawada diocese in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh, was found dead on Oct. 26, 2022.

His mother, Kondru Srungaram, has petitioned the Andhra Pradesh High Court now seeking directions for a probe by the Crime Investigation Department (CID), a special branch of the state police. Her petition to the court also sought an order to exhume the body for a postmortem. Advocate Shaik Ameena Rahamani, who is representing the priest's family, said they will wait and see what steps the high court takes. Srungaram has accused the local police of hushing up the truth in connivance with "a powerful lobby" in the diocese.

Diocesan officials claimed it was a case of suicide but the family suspects Father Raju was killed. UCA News tried to contact Bishop Joseph Raja Rao Thelangathi of Vijaywada but he was not available for his comments.

Srungaram alleged that the hands and legs were black as coal though "my son was very fair" raising her suspicion that he was killed before his body was hung to make it look like a suicide. The family claimed that a proper postmortem was not done. Srungaram also questioned the absence of the bishop and other priests in the diocese at her son's funeral service.

Indonesian Catholic priest commits suicide

(16-2-23) The body of a Catholic priest in Indonesia's Ruteng Diocese was found hanging in his residence on Feb. 16 and police confirmed it as a case of suicide.

The body of Father Gregoris Transianus Syukur was found in his room at St. Klaus Kuwu High School complex in the Christian-majority East Nusa Tenggara province. "From the results of the initial examination and external post-mortem by the doctor, the cause of the death was because...he hanged himself," said Yoce Marten, the top police official in Manggarai district, where the school is located. "There were no signs of violence on the victim's body," Marten told reporters in Ruteng on Feb.16. Diocesan sources told UCA News that the priest allegedly ended his life after he was recently summoned by the diocesan authorities to explain his alleged love affair with a female teacher at the school he presided over. The source further said, "We received information that he was told to resign from priesthood."

Nicaragua strips 94 more dissidents of their citizenship

(16-2-23) A Nicaraguan court under President Daniel Ortega stripped the citizenship from 94 exiled dissidents and declared them to be "traitors to the fatherland," drawing sharp criticism from a regional UN watchdog agency.

Among the dissidents is perhaps Nicaragua's most acclaimed living author, Sergio Ramirez, who once served as vice president under Ortega, who has been widely accused of authoritarianism. Others include a Catholic bishop, Silvio Baez, and several former comrades-in-arms of Ortega in the leftist Sandinista Front that came to power in 1979, only to lose elections in 1990.

17-2-23

Pope issues Lenten Message

(17-2-23) In his Lenten Message, released by the Vatican on February 17, Pope Francis, likens the penitential season to the Transfiguration, saying that during Lent “the Lord takes us with him to a place apart.”

In those forty days, the Pope writes, “we are invited to ascend a ‘high mountain’ in the company of Jesus and to live a particular experience of spiritual discipline—*ascesis*—as God’s holy people.”

The papal message also likens the practice of penance with the experience of the Synod, saying that both “alike have as their goal a transfiguration, both personal and ecclesial.”

The two essential elements of both penance and the Synod, the Pope says, are “to listen to Jesus,” and “not take refuge in a religiosity made up of extraordinary events and dramatic experiences, out of fear of facing reality and its daily struggles, its hardships and contradictions.”



Pope tells Jesuits in Africa he twice refused to become a bishop

(17-2-23) The Jesuit journal *La Civiltà Cattolica* has published the transcript of conversations Pope Francis had recently with Jesuits in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan.

The Pope revealed that “when they proposed me to be auxiliary bishop of San Miguel [Argentina], I did not accept. Then I was asked to be bishop of an area in northern Argentina, in the province of Corrientes. The papal nuncio, to encourage me to accept, told me that there were the ruins of the Jesuit past there. I replied that I did not want to be guardian of the ruins, and I refused.”

“The third time the nuncio came, but already with the authorization signed by the superior general, Father Kolvenbach, who had agreed to my accepting,” the Pope continued. “It was as an auxiliary bishop of Buenos Aires. Therefore I accepted in a spirit of obedience.”

The Diocese of San Miguel has never had an auxiliary bishop, so it is difficult to assess the timing of the first potential appointment. The Diocese of Santo Tomé is located in Corrientes province and had a Jesuit presence in the 17th century; bishops were appointed there in 1986 and 1994. The future Pope Francis was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Buenos Aires in May 1992.

Build up spiritual capital, Pope tells Mexican entrepreneurs

(17-2-23) Meeting on February 17 with a group of Mexican business executives, Pope Francis lamented: “The culture of our time is infested by individualism and closed-mindedness.”

The Pope spoke of “the consequences of our consciences being numbed by comfort,” and “how wars can bring destruction to all the human family.” Against these evils, he said, “The most important capital we can have is spiritual capital.”

Nigeria’s bishops encourage votes for moral candidates

(17-2-23) “We encourage all eligible citizens to come out en masse to vote for God-fearing, honest, vibrant, and transparent leaders for a better Nigeria,” the bishops of Africa’s most populous nation said in a statement for the national elections on February 25.

New ordinations to help Vietnam's Hmong Catholics

(17-2-23) The ordination of 16 new deacons in a Vietnamese diocese will ease its burden of not having enough priests to work among Hmong ethnic people in its far-flung villages, say Church workers.

Bishop Dominic Hoang Minh Tien of Hung Hoa Diocese in Vietnam's Northwest ordained 16 transitional deacons for the diocese on Feb. 14. Three of them are ethnic Hmong people.

Father Nguyen Ngoc Ngoan, who works with the diocesan Ministry Committee for the Laity said most Hmong Catholics are in three mountainous provinces of Dien Bien, Lai Chau and Son La.

Myanmar junta to close Kachin IDP camps

(17-2-23) To prove that normalcy has returned ahead of polls in August this year, the junta in civil war-torn Myanmar is winding up shelter camps, leaving thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the lurch.

Nearly 25 camps in Myitkyina, the capital of Christian-majority northern Kachin State, are slated for closure as the army has reportedly ordered their inhabitants to leave by March-end, according to local sources.

The camps house more than 11,000 people and have been run by the Catholic and Baptist churches since 2011, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The inhabitants were given three options — to return to their places of origin, to move to a new resettlement area or make their own arrangements, the sources said.

Africa - Strong resumption of jihadist attacks in the Maghreb and Sahel in January

(17-2-23) According to the Spanish International Observatory for Studies on Terrorism (OIET), the results of the activities of the various jihadist groups operating in the Maghreb and the Sahel are: 134 attacks that caused 415 victims in the month of January 2023 alone. At the top of this sad ranking, Burkina Faso is located with 60 attacks, followed by Mali with 36, then Niger with 14, Cameroon with 11 and, worryingly, the coastal states of the Gulf of Guinea: Benin and Togo.

The main jihadist groups are the Islamic State in the Sahel (EIS) and the Islamic and Muslim Support Group (Jamā'at nuṣrat al-islām wal-muslimīn, JNIM) linked to Al-Qaeda. These two groups compete to control the areas between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, where caravan routes have passed through for centuries, for both legal and illegal trade.



Laos and Cambodia - the proclamation of the Kingdom of God to the poor

(17-2-23) "Our extremely small Churches (0.1% of the population in Cambodia, - 0.5% in Laos), live in conditions similar to those of the Acts of the Apostles, with first or second generation Christians (in Cambodia in particular) or in rather oppressive political and social contexts (in Laos in particular) and are a sign of the Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus: the Good News is proclaimed to the poor. Proclaiming the Kingdom is our priority in order to open

paths of hope to those whom our societies leave on the side of the road", write the Bishops of the Episcopal Conference of Laos and Cambodia (CELAC), who gathered in Phnom Penh for their annual assembly and to give their contribution to the Synod on Synodality.

The Churches of Laos and Cambodia make an important reference to the presence and formation of a local clergy, given that there are dozens of local priests in Cambodia and about twenty in Laos, a phenomenon also explained by the trend of smaller families.

A focal point, it is noted, is the participation of the laity: "the work of their formation must be our priority". In this context, the local Churches are faced with language difficulties, in fact in Cambodia, 90% of the personnel engaged in pastoral service are foreigners, while in Laos, the Laotians engaged in pastoral ministry are a very small number.

In this context, a fundamental point that the Bishops identify, in relation to the condition and life of their communities, in fact, is the presence of young people, who are very easily exposed and attracted to a "post-modern and ultra-developed" culture, coming into contact with the world of the Metaverse, of social networks, realities that strongly influence their human, cultural and spiritual development. The bishops also note that to be tapped is the Asian spiritual tradition, particularly, Buddhist tradition, encouraging a personal relationship with God, the source of any mission experience.

New ordinations to help Vietnam's Hmong Catholics

(17-2-23) The ordination of 16 new deacons in a Vietnamese diocese will ease its burden of not having enough priests to work among Hmong ethnic people in its far-flung villages, say Church workers.

Bishop Dominic Hoang Minh Tien of Hung Hoa Diocese in Vietnam's Northwest ordained 16 transitional deacons for the diocese on Feb. 14. Three of them are ethnic Hmong people.

Father Nguyen Ngoc Ngoan, who works with the diocesan Ministry Committee for the Laity said most Hmong Catholics are in three mountainous provinces of Dien Bien, Lai Chau and Son La.

Myanmar junta to close Kachin IDP camps

(17-2-23) To prove that normalcy has returned ahead of polls in August this year, the junta in civil war-torn Myanmar is winding up nearly 25 shelter camps, leaving thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Christian-majority northern Kachin state in the lurch.

The camps house more than 11,000 people and have been run by the Catholic and Baptist churches since 2011, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The inhabitants were given three options — to return to their places of origin, to move to a new resettlement area or make their own arrangements, the sources said.

18-2-23

Pope: War steals children's smiles but we must never lose hope

(18-2-23) Pope Francis took 10 questions to knit together the 10 years of his pontificate from Fr. Davide Banzato, a priest of the New Horizons community and presenter of Italian TV program "Journeys of the Heart", aired on Saturday 18 February.

The Pope talked of memory. The grace of memory takes us to the roots of our current situation. Bad things, Pope Francis noted, occur frequently in our times. We have just emerged from a pandemic that has "weakened us" and now war has broken out.

"This war is fierce" and has caused "an economic and financial crisis," he lamented. The Pope expressed his particular anguish for children affected by war.

"They have forgotten how to laugh... So many children have come here [to Italy], so many from Ukraine, and they don't laugh... They are lovely, yes, but they don't laugh; they have lost that. I went to see the children who were at the Bambino Gesù Hospital. Of the wounded Ukrainian children, not one bore a smile."

Pope Francis added that "to take away a child's smile is... a tragedy" which marks our time: "Ours is a time in which the biggest market is the sale of weapons from weapons factories. Today, if for one year, according to one expert, no weapons were made, world hunger would end."

Argentina - Alarm over the trafficking of Russian women who emigrate to Argentina to give birth

(18-2-23) The national Migrations organization of Argentina says, there is an organization which, "in exchange for a large sum of money, offers pregnant Russian women a tourist package for childbirth with their Argentine passport as the main reason for travel". Many future mothers began to arrive en masse in the Latin American country in the second half of 2022, months after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which phenomenon in its trail has brought in corruption.

Argentine national law allows foreigners who have an Argentine child to obtain permanent residence immediately, while two years of uninterrupted residence in the country are required to obtain citizenship. With the Argentine passport they get visa-free entry to 170 countries around the world.

The issue broke out last Wednesday, February 8 and Thursday, February 9, when the immigration authorities detained six pregnant Russian women who had just landed at Ezeiza International Airport, on charges of being 'false tourists'. However, on February 10 a federal judge ordered that they be allowed to enter the country, though they had faced near-torture experience. On the same night of

Friday 10, shortly after the court ruling, 33 Russian citizens between 32 and 34 weeks pregnant arrived in Buenos Aires on an Ethiopian Airlines flight from Addis Ababa. As reported by the National Migrations Director, 10,500 people of Russian nationality entered Argentina in 2022 and 5,819 of them were pregnant women; once they give birth in Argentina, "they and their husbands, as parents, will be able to obtain citizenship in a short time." Now these entrants face criminal proceedings.

19-2-23

Pope at Angelus: Strive for the 'extraordinary'

(19-2-23) Do not be complacent, but, like Jesus, always strive to do the 'extraordinary.'

Pope Francis made this exhortation during his Sunday Angelus, as he addressed the thousands of faithful and visitors gathered in St. Peter's Square at midday on Sunday.

The Pope began by observing that Jesus' words to us in the day's Gospel reading according to St. Matthew, are "demanding" and "seem paradoxical," as the Lord invites faithful to turn the other cheek and love their enemies. It is normal for us to love those who love us, and be friends with those who are friends with us, "yet," Pope Francis highlighted, "Jesus provokes us by saying: if you act in this way, *"What do you do that is extraordinary? This is the point to which I would like to draw your attention today."*

"Extraordinary," the Pope said, is that which goes beyond the limits of the usual, and exceeds usual practices and normal calculations, "dictated by prudence." Generally speaking, the Holy Father observed, we try to have everything in order and under control, so that it corresponds to our expectations. The Lord, however, the Pope said, "warns us that this is not enough."

"If we remain in the ordinary, in the balance between giving and receiving, things do not change. If God were to follow this logic, we would have no hope of salvation! But, fortunately for us, God's love is always 'extraordinary.'" If God had not unbalanced Himself, we would never have been saved: Jesus would not have come looking for us while we were lost and far away."

God, he said, demonstrates His love for us in the fact that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Only in this way, the Pope underscored, will we truly bear witness to Him, by stepping out of the "logic of self-interest," and not "measuring" love on "the scales of calculations and convenience.



"Pope appeals for Turkey, Syria quake victims, Ukraine & New Zealand cyclone"

(19-2-23) Addressing the thousands gathered in St. Peter's Square for the Angelus, the Pope said, his thoughts go at this time to the peoples of these countries, hard hit by natural disasters, and war, that caused more than fortyfive thousand deaths and injuries.

"I think especially of Syria and Turkey, of the many victims of the earthquake, but I also think of the daily dramas of the dear Ukrainian people and of so many peoples who suffer because of war ... poverty, lack of freedom or environmental devastation" Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the Pope's Almoner and the Prefect of the Dicastery for the Service of Charity, is bringing Pope Francis' newest package of humanitarian aid to the quake-struck population in Turkey as an "immediate commitment" to "a suffering people."

The Pope also said, "I am close to the people of New Zealand, who have been hit in recent days by a devastating cyclone." *"Brothers and sisters, let us not forget those who suffer and let our charity be attentive, let it be a concrete charity!"*

This Friday, 24 Feb., will mark a year since the start of the devastating war which has claimed countless lives, a year full of Pope Francis' appeals for peace, aid, and an end to the violence.
