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Diocese launches 80th anniversary celebrations invoking blessings on the city

HONG KONG (SE): The Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong launched its 80th anniversary celebrations in 2026 with Love – a Spring of Hope, a public prayer and cultural event held on January 18 at Chater Garden in Central. Featuring music, prayer and performances, the gathering brought together Church leaders, government officials and the wider community to give thanks for eight decades of the Church's presence and mission in Hong Kong.

At the outset of the celebration, Cardinal Stephen Chow, S.J., bishop of Hong Kong, prayed for "God's blessings for Hong Kong and everyone present, with love, faith and hope that does not disappoint."

The celebration was honoured by the presence of Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle, pro-prefect of the Section for First Evangelisation and New Particular Churches of the Dicastery for Evangelisation, and John Lee Ka-chiu, the chief executive of the Hong Kong SAR.

In his welcoming address, Cardinal Stephen thanked Cardinal Tagle and the chief executive for their presence, and warmly greeted leaders of other Christian denominations, priests and religious, and the people of Hong Kong.

He said the diocese was profoundly blessed to mark its 80th anniversary, commemorating its establishment as a diocese in 1946. "It is therefore our sincere desire to celebrate this anniversary with a prayerful and meaningful event, blessing Hong Kong, our beloved people and the city," he said.

Referring to January 6—the Solemnity of the Epiphany and the closing of the Holy Door at St Peter's Basilica—Cardinal Stephen noted the symbolic conclusion of the Jubilee Year of Hope.

Recalling the words of Pope Leo XIV while closing the Holy Door, Cardinal Stephen reminded the faithful that the door of the



Sacred Heart of Jesus remains always open, especially "when-ever we are weary or burdened."

Lee praised the diocese for its eight decades of significant contributions in education, healthcare and social services, describing it as a unifying and compassionate force in society.

The chief executive called for continued unity and cooperation, expressing confidence that the diocese would remain a key partner in building a harmonious and prosperous future for Hong Kong.

"I am confident that the diocese will continue to create positivity for the community, working hand in hand with the government and the people of Hong Kong," Lee said.

In his homily, Cardinal Tagle said, "There is no better way to celebrate God's fidelity and goodness than to pray together for the blessing of Hong Kong, for the Church exists not for itself, but for the service of everyone."

Reflecting on the meaning of true blessing, he said it involves seeing God's face and allowing God to gaze gently upon us, echoing Psalm 80:3: "Make your face shine on us, that we may be saved." He added, "May the face of Jesus always smile upon Hong Kong, and may Hong Kong rejoice in the face of Jesus" [see Page 2].

Cardinal Tagle and Cardinal Stephen then imparted a final blessing to the large crowd gath-



ered at Chater Garden, encouraging all present to be messengers of hope in their communities.

Also in attendance were Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha Chi-shing, members of the diocesan Curia, and Monsignor Jose Luis Diaz-Mariblanca Sanchez, head of the Holy See Study Mission, along with priests and religious sisters.

Government representatives included Bernadette Linn Hon-ho, secretary for Development; Ingrid Yeung Ho Poi-yan, secretary for the Civil Service; and Alice Mak Mei-kuen, secretary for Home and Youth Affairs. Former chief executives Carrie

Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor and Donald Tsang Yam-kuen were also present.

Leaders from other Christian denominations included Anglican Archbishop Andrew Chan Au-ming, Bishop Matthias Clement Der Tze-Wo, and Bishop Jackson Yeung Yau-chi of the Lutheran Church.

Speaking to the *Sunday Examiner*, Bishop Yeung said he was deeply moved by the anniversary theme song, which illustrated the Church's contribution to society, particularly during challenging periods such as the post-war influx of refugees. He noted that Catholic and other Christian communities have long provided essential services and served as a foundation for social stability.

He expressed hope that Christian Churches would continue to join hands in blessing Hong Kong together.

The programme featured the anniversary theme song performed by four singers accompanied by the Diocesan English Youth Band.

Children from St Margaret Mary's Church presented a dance, with nearly 20 children using rainbows and stars to express their hopes. A drama by Wheat Ears Theatre engaged the audience through a simple catechism quiz, underscoring the call to share gospel love with all.

The Catholic Rosary Evangelical Dance Group performed an interactive dance, encouraging everyone to be a light to others, while the Diocesan English Youth Band led the audience in songs proclaiming hope and God's promises.

The prayer service included readings from the New Testament in Chinese and English, as well as prayers of the faithful offered in multiple languages—Cantonese, English, Filipino, French, Putonghua, Korean and Vietnamese—for Hong Kong, care for the environment and world peace.

Cardinal Tagle prays that the face of Jesus shine upon Hong Kong

HONG KONG (SE): “May the face of Jesus always smile upon Hong Kong.” With these words, Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle offered a deeply reflective and pastoral message during the prayer and music service kicking off the celebration of the 80th anniversary of the Diocese of Hong Kong at Chater Garden on January 18.

Speaking to a large and attentive crowd, Cardinal Tagle invited the city to rediscover the meaning of true blessing as the loving gaze of God that brings protection, peace and hope to all.

The pro-prefect of the Section for First Evangelisation and New Particular Churches of the Dicastery for Evangelisation, expressed gratitude for the opportunity to gather in prayer for Hong Kong. He said the occasion was itself a sign that the Church exists not for its own sake, but for the service of all people.

Drawing from scripture, the cardinal reflected on the true nature of blessing, cautioning against reducing it to personal gain or success at the expense of others. Referring to the Book of Numbers, he recalled God instructing the sons of Aaron how to impart blessings on his people: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace” [Numbers 6:24–26].

“The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace’. That is the blessing God wants to give us,” he emphasised.

Turning to the image of God’s face, Cardinal Tagle described Jesus Christ as the visible, human face of the invisible God. Yet, he said, blessing is not complete by sight alone, it also requires listening. “Seeing Jesus’ face and hearing the Father’s voice will change our lives,” he said, recalling how Peter, James and John were transformed by their encounter with Christ.



He went on to highlight five aspects of the face of Jesus as a blessing: the face of a child, the face of humility, the face of compassion and mercy, the face of solidarity with those on the margins, and the face of the crucified and risen Lord.

Acknowledging that the face of the risen Christ is not always easy to recognise, Cardinal Tagle encouraged the faithful to seek Jesus in ordinary life—in work, laughter, suffering and quiet moments. “Open your eyes,” he urged. “The face of the risen one

is just there.” He reassured the gathering that Christ remains faithful to his promise to be with his people until the end of time, accompanying them through both struggles and joys.

“The real blessing for Hong Kong,” the cardinal said, “is the face of God shining upon it.” He said with a prayerful hope: “May the face of Jesus always smile upon Hong Kong, and may Hong Kong rejoice in the face of Jesus.”

As he brought his homily to a close, Cardinal Tagle issued a gentle but challenging invitation. “When you see the face of Jesus, look at him. Show your face,” he said. “May the light of the face of Jesus shine through your face,



and let that be the light of blessing for the whole of Hong Kong.”

Cardinal Tagle arrived in Hong Kong earlier that day, after presiding at the installation of Bishop Samuel Agcaracar, as bishop of San Jose in Nueva Ecija, at the Divine Word Seminary in Tagaytay City on January 17. The newly installed bishop was one of his former students.

He was met at Hong Kong International Airport by Cardinal Stephen, Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha Chi-shing, Sister Corazon Demetillo, and Sister Victoria Victorino of the Diocesan Pastoral Centre for Filipinos.

Sister Demetillo later recalled that she briefly discussed migrant issues with Cardinal Tagle, noting the support provided by local

parishes for migrant integration and the diocese’s expanding services for asylum seekers and refugees, in collaboration with the Philippine Consulate. The cardinal responded positively to these initiatives.

The prayer and music service drew strong participation from the Filipino Catholic community in Hong Kong, including Divine Word Father Jay Flandez, Filipino chaplain, and Romulo Victor Israel, Philippine consul general. Parishioners from St Joseph’s Church, Garden Road, held a banner welcoming Cardinal Tagle.

The cardinal departed Hong Kong for Manila later that evening to attend a meeting the following morning.



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Reverend Adam Mo Guanwen (left), from the Anglican St. Paul's Church, and Father Dominic Chan and Father Francis Choi at the Cathedral of Immaculate Conception on January 18. Photo: Facebook

Christian Unity Week: showing love in a divided world

HONG KONG (SE): For the 2026 Week of Christian Unity, Christians are being urged to work together to advance God's kingdom in a divided world. A joint statement by Hong Kong's Christian denominations calls on both communities and individual believers to embody Christ's love.

"In today's Church, facing divisions and diverse challenges, the apostolic call to unity is directed not only to communities but to each individual believer. We are called to live out unity, reflecting Christ's love and grace, and advancing his Kingdom on earth," said the joint statement, which was issued by the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission, the Ecumenical Patriarchate Orthodox Metropolitanate of Hong Kong and Southeast Asia, and the Hong Kong Christian Council.

The theme for this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity centres on Ephesians 4:4: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling." St. Paul notes that although the Church consists of diverse members, it operates as a single entity in Christ, united by the Holy Spirit.

This year's key events begin with a Joint Ecumenical Communion Service at Truth Lutheran Church for Christian leaders and co-workers on January 22, led by Reverend Wong Ka-fai of the Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China. This will be followed by an Ecu-

'...We are called to live out unity, reflecting Christ's love and grace, and advancing his Kingdom on earth.'

menical Prayer Evening at Ward Memorial Methodist Church on January 24, during which Father Chor Yuk-wa has been invited to deliver a message.

On Unity Sunday, January 18, churches were encouraged to pray together and exchange pulpits. For example, Reverend Adam Mo Guanwen of the Anglican St. Paul's Church was invited to deliver a homily at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, while the assistant parish priest of the cathedral, Father Francis Choi Chor-fung, was invited to give a sermon at St. Paul's Church on January 25.

The cathedral community has maintained regular contact with other Christian denominations. On January 13, parishioners and clergy from the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, the Anglican St John's Cathedral, and St Paul's Church participated in an ecumenical visit in Central to explore the history and development of the church communities. They were joined by historian, Joseph Ting Sun Pao.

Pilgrims also met Anglican Archbishop Emeritus Peter Kwong Kong-kit at St John's Cathedral.

Prayer service for the opening of the legal year

HONG KONG (SE): The St. Thomas More Society of Hong Kong organised a prayer service at St. Joseph's Church, Garden Road on January 18, for the opening of the 2026 legal year.

The service was officiated by Cardinal Stephen Chow, S.J., the bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong, and Anglican Archbishop Andrew Chan of the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui.

The homily was given by Jesuit Father Alan Wong, the supervisor of Wah Yan College, Hong Kong.

In his homily, Father Wong meditated on the transformative power of compassion and recognition in law, justice, and spiritual life. Drawing from the parable of the Good Samaritan, he said that true justice is not solely about actions or rules, but about seeing and responding to others with empathy, mercy, and love—seeing with God's eyes.

Referencing German philosopher, Axel Honneth, he observed that many social problems arise



from how we perceive and recognise each other, stressing that justice involves seeing others with compassion, dignity, and respect, not just legal compliance.

"If we all looked at each other with more compassion, pity, mercy, love then this would slowly affect the world as well," Father Wong noted.

He noted that St. Ignatius of Loyola asks that when we pray,

we first ask "for the gift to look with the eyes of God, to see from God's perspective of love, and mercy."

He encouraged those in attendance to reflect deeply on their actions and prayers, urging them to strive to view themselves and others through God's eyes. The message concluded with a call, echoing the words of Jesus, to "go and do likewise."

Reflections from the vicar general

By Father Joseph Chan Wing-chiu

Heartfelt connection



Each January, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity reminds us that unity is not an abstract ideal, but the very heart of Christian life. Saint Paul's exhortation to the early Church in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 still resonates with us today: "I urge you to agree with one another... but be united in mind and thought" [1 Corinthians 1:10].

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church after hearing of their divisions, with some claiming allegiance to various leaders, such as himself or Apollos. This reveals humanity's tendency to focus faith on individuals or personal preferences, rather than on Christ, who is the foundation of faith. Paul's direct question, "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you?" [1 Corinthians 1:13] has echoed across 2,000 years and continues to challenge us.

Today, though the Church may be more structured, divisions persist: between parishes, among groups, and even within the same faith community, often due to differing viewpoints and approaches that lead to misunderstanding.

Christian unity must go beyond slogans or annual prayer weeks; it begins in our daily lives. Paul emphasises the importance of "being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart" [Philippians 2:2]. This is a call to action:

- Start within your faith community: Are we willing to set aside personal preferences for the common good? Do we respect differing opinions in discussions?
- Broaden it to the parish level: A parish should be a faith family, not merely an event centre. Are we fostering cooperation rather than comparison or criticism?
- Expand to the diocesan level and beyond: the diversity of the Church is a gift, not a cause for division. Different parishes, religious orders, and pastoral approaches all serve the same mission: to help people come to know Christ.

Paul's message applies not only within Catholicism, but to the entire Christian family. Jesus prayed at the Last Supper, "that all of them may be one" [John 17:21]. This is not optional; it is his desire. Unity does not require uniformity, but rather an acknowledgement of our shared identity in Christ as we journey together in faith.

In Hong Kong, we are fortunate to have good relations with other Christian groups, yet it remains essential to deepen collaboration in areas such as social services and youth development to bear witness to Christ's love.

Unity arises not from human effort, but as a gift of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity reminds us that prayer is the first and most essential step. As we remember one another in prayer, our hearts draw closer, and divisions begin to dissolve.

This year's prayer week invites us to reflect on Paul's question: "Is Christ divided?" Let us extend humility and love from our communities to parishes and dioceses, and partner with other Christian groups on the journey to unity. For unity is not our achievement, but a gift from Christ that reflects his deepest longing for the world. May we seek him in prayer and witness him in our unity.

Hong Kong Catholic Church
Sunday Mass Schedule
 You can obtain the Mass times and whereabouts of churches from the Hong Kong Catholic Church's website
<http://www.catholic.org.hk>

Cardinal warns a 'crisis of values' amid global uncertainty may lead to international war



A woman walks past the state tax building in Tehran, Iran, on January 19, burned during recent anti-regime protests. Photo: OSV News/Majid Asgaripour/WANA (West Asia News Agency) via Reuters

(OSV NEWS): From unilateral actions in Venezuela to continued violence in Iran, the world is steadily sliding into a "crisis of values" that risks sparking international war, Pietro Cardinal Parolin, the Vatican secretary of state, warned on January 17.

Speaking to journalists outside Rome's Domus Mariae Church, Cardinal Parolin lamented the decline of diplomacy and confirmed a *Washington Post* report that the Holy See tried and failed to broker a peaceful transition in Venezuela.

"We had tried to find a solution that would avoid any bloodshed, perhaps by reaching an agreement also with [Venezuelan president, Nicolás] Maduro and with the other representatives of the regime, but this was not possible," Cardinal Parolin said, according to the Italian newspaper, *Il Corriere Della Sera*.

The *Washington Post* reported that the cardinal met on Christmas Eve with Brian Burch, the United States' ambassador to the Holy See, to inform US officials that Russia was willing to grant asylum to Maduro in an attempt to avoid bloodshed in Venezuela.

Ultimately, the US carried out a military operation in the early morning hours of January 3, resulting in the capture of Maduro and his wife, and transporting them to New York to face narco-terrorism conspiracy charges.

'Conscience and reason can no longer tolerate violations of sovereignty in their most diverse forms, the forced displacement of entire peoples'

After confirming the report, Cardinal Parolin said he hoped that the current situation "evolves toward stability, toward economic recovery—because the economic situation is truly very, very precarious—and also toward a democratisation of the country."

Il Corriere Della Sera reported that before celebrating Mass on January 17, the Vatican secretary of state delivered a lecture at the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy, the institution that trains priests for service in the diplomatic corps and the Secretariat of State.

In his lecture, Cardinal Parolin warned of a "crisis of multipolarism" that "disregards the values upon which the communi-

ty of nations was gradually built.

"Conscience and reason can no longer tolerate violations of sovereignty in their most diverse forms, the forced displacement of entire peoples, the change in the ethnic composition of territories, the subtraction of means necessary for economic activity, or the limitation of freedoms," the cardinal said.

Responding to a question regarding repeated threats by US president, Donald Trump, to acquire Greenland, Cardinal Parolin recalled his lecture and told journalists that solutions based on force "cannot be used."

He also warned that the "spirit of multilateralism that characterised the post-war years" was "being lost."

He stressed, "This is not acceptable, and will lead increasingly to conflict, to a war within the international community."

Cardinal Parolin also expressed his concern over the "endless tragedy" in Iran where a crackdown on anti-government protests resulted in the deaths of thousands of people.

"I ask myself how it is possible to rage against one's own people, that there have been so many deaths—it is an endless tragedy," the cardinal said.

The Vatican secretary of state emphasised the Holy See's consistent call for diplomatic solutions instead of resorting to armed conflict and expressed his hope "that we can reach a resolution to this state of affairs."

EDITORIAL

SUNDAY EXAMINER

25 JANUARY 2026

Receiving and practicing peace

IN EARLY MARCH last year, the United Nations adopted a resolution declaring 28 January as the International Day of Living Together in Peace [not to be confused with the International Day of Peace on May 16]. The purpose is clear: to foster tolerance, respect for religious and cultural diversity, and the advancement of human rights. The resolution calls upon nations, international organisations, civil society, and the media to mark this day with meaningful activities that cultivate a culture of peace, inclusion, understanding, and solidarity.

Yet despite such aspirations, aggression continues to scar many regions. The ambitions of leaders, quests for military expansion, and the pursuit of natural resources all too often ignite conflicts that leave innocent people suffering in the flames of war. The Russia-Ukraine conflict, now approaching its fourth year, exemplifies this tragedy. Despite ongoing international mediation, Russia and Ukraine have yet to reach a comprehensive ceasefire agreement. The road to peace, it seems, remains perilously long.

Closer to home in Asia, the border between Thailand and Cambodia erupted in violence in early December last year, with both sides exchanging attacks that resulted in civilian and military casualties. The fallout was immediate: residents evacuated border areas, local schools closed, and teachers and students sought temporary refuge with relatives in other villages. The Jesuit-run Xavier School in Cambodia—including its kindergarten, primary, and secondary divisions—was among those affected.

A Catholic lay missionary from Hong Kong, serving at the school, described the sporadic sounds of shelling but assured that, for now, all is calm. Such incidents remind us that war is never remote; indifference is not an option, and ignoring global conflict is a privilege we cannot afford.

In these times of mounting instability and conflict, the imperative to live together in peace has never been clearer. Peace is not merely the absence of war; it demands that, amid differences of gender, race, language, religion, or culture, we embrace one another with openness.

This year marks the 800th anniversary of the death of St. Francis of Assisi, whose legacy endures in the greeting, "may the Lord give you peace." As Pope Leo XIV reminded the Franciscans, peace is the sum of all good—a gift from God that we are called to receive and practise daily.

Last Sunday, January 18, the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong hosted the "Love – A Spring of Hope," a musical prayer gathering at Chater Garden in Central. The event symbolised a move beyond cathedral walls and into the heart of the community, spreading God's love to all in Hong Kong while marking the diocese's 80th anniversary. It was a living testament to a message of peace that has accompanied the people of Hong Kong through every trial and triumph.

Peace is not a destination but an ongoing journey—a long-term aspiration that demands our unwavering commitment. Let us, therefore, embrace wholeheartedly the principles and mission of love, seeking reconciliation not only with one another but with all of creation. *SE*

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Pope Leo speaking to journalists during a news conference aboard his flight from Turkey to Lebanon, on 30 November 2025. Photo: CNS /Lola Gomez

Anticipated papal visits for 2026

((OSV NEWS): Bishops in Angola, Algeria, and Spain have announced that Pope Leo XIV will visit their countries this year.

Although the Vatican has not formally announced Pope Leo's 2026 travel plans, these statements echo the pope's words during a December 2 press conference aboard a papal flight to Rome.

"I hope to make a trip to Africa. That would possibly be the next journey," the pope told journalists. "I hope to go to Algeria to visit the places of St. Augustine, but also in order to continue the conversation of dialogue, of building bridges between the Christian world and the Muslim world."

Jean-Paul Cardinal Vesco of Algiers, told journalists outside the Paul VI audience hall on January 8 that he discussed the possibility of a trip with the pope during the extraordinary consistory and that the visit was "on track."

He said northern Algeria will most likely be the pope's "next trip," expected in early 2026, though no date was given.

On January 13, Archbishop Kryspin Dubiel, apostolic nuncio to Angola, announced Pope Leo had accepted invitations from Church and government officials to visit Angola this year.

"I wish to inform you that the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, intends to visit the African continent, and Angola is also included in the itinerary of this trip," Archbishop Dubiel said.

He expressed hope that the visit would help rediscover and share Angolan values worldwide.

Archbishop Filomeno Vieira Dias of Luanda noted the visit will coincide with Luanda's 450th anniversary celebrations.

"It is a celebration of a life path that has marked our history for more than five centuries," the archbishop said.

'I hope to go to Algeria to visit the places of St. Augustine, but also in order to continue the conversation of dialogue, of building bridges between the Christian world and the Muslim world.'

In November, the pope also expressed hope to visit other destinations, including the Marian sites of Fatima and Guadalupe.

While nothing is confirmed for Portugal, the Archdiocese of Mexico City issued a statement on January 14 after a meeting between the pope and Carlos Cardinal Aguiar Retes of Mexico City.

According to the statement, Cardinal Aguiar invited the pope to visit Mexico, an invitation first extended just after the conclave.

The pope expressed gratitude and his interest in visiting Mexico soon to entrust his pontificate to the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Mexico City is home to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, site of Mary's apparitions to St. Juan Diego in 1531.

Unlike the announcements for Africa, it is unclear if the pope will visit Mexico this year. However, a trip to Spain in June was recently confirmed by José Cardinal Cobo of Madrid.

The trip is expected to include Madrid, Barcelona, the Canary Islands, and possibly the city of Guadalupe, home to a UNESCO-listed medieval monastery and pilgrimage site.

US cardinals call for 'genuinely moral foreign policy for our nation'

((OSV NEWS): Three US cardinals have called for a genuinely moral foreign policy, arguing that the nation is undergoing its deepest debate on the ethics behind its global actions since the Cold War.

Blase Cardinal Cupich of Chicago, Robert Cardinal McElroy of Washington and Joseph Cardinal Tobin of Newark, New Jersey, released the statement on January 19, focusing on the "enduring ethical compass" for foreign policy that Pope Leo XIV provided in his January 9 address to members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See.

They pointed to recent turmoil in Venezuela, Ukraine, and Greenland as evidence that core questions about military intervention and the nature of peace are unresolved.

The US recently staged a military intervention in which Venezuela's president, Nicolás Maduro, and his wife, Cilia Flores, were captured and brought to the US to face federal narco-trafficking and weapons charges.

US president, Donald Trump declared he would "run" Venezuela.

Recently, Trump vowed to acquire Greenland—a semi-autonomous region of the Kingdom of Denmark—by purchase or military force, and threatened tariffs on several European nations opposed to the plan.

The cardinals argued, "The sovereign rights of nations to self-determination appear all too fragile in a world of ever greater conflagrations," adding, "The balancing of national interest with the common good is being framed within starkly polarised terms."

United Nations secretary-general, António Guterres, told BBC Radio 4 on January 18 that current US foreign policy shows "a clear conviction that multilateral solutions are not relevant and that what matters is the exercise of the power and the influence of the United States and sometimes in this respect by the norms of international law."

The cardinals noted that America's traditional role in defending life, dignity, and religious freedom is now under scrutiny. They warned that peace-building is increasingly reduced to partisan politics, fueling division and harmful policies.

With the postwar order weakening and the UN Charter's prohibitions on force under threat, the cardinals called for a renewed



A aerial view of Nuuk, Greenland. Archbishop Broglio of the US Archdiocese for the Military Services said soldiers could in good conscience disobey "morally questionable" orders to participate in an invasion of Greenland. A day later, three US cardinals called for a genuinely moral foreign policy. Photo: OSV News/Marko Djurica, Reuters

commitment to moral principles in global relations, echoing Pope Leo's recent January 9 message.

Chicko Noguchi, spokesperson for the US Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], said that the conference "was consulted on the statement" and that that USCCB president, Archbishop Paul Coakley of Oklahoma City, "supports the emphasis placed by the cardinals on Pope Leo's teaching in these times."

The cardinals quoted Pope Leo's January 9 address to diplomats, in which he had warned that "diplomacy that promotes dialogue and seeks consensus among all parties is being replaced by a diplomacy based on force, by either individuals or groups of allies."

The pope warned, "War is back in vogue and a zeal for war is spreading," adding that the postwar principle against violating borders by force "has been completely undermined."

The cardinals highlighted Pope Leo's affirmation that protecting the right to life underpins all other rights, and that practices like abortion and euthanasia undermine this foundation.

They referenced the pope's concerns about wealthy countries cutting humanitarian aid, and about growing violations of conscience and religious freedom in the name of ideology or purity.

"As pastors and citizens, we embrace this vision for the establishment of a genuinely moral foreign policy for our nation," the cardinals said. "We seek to build a truly just and lasting peace, that peace which Jesus proclaimed in the gospel."

They added, "We renounce war as an instrument for narrow national interests and pro-

claim that military action must be seen only as a last resort in extreme situations, not a normal instrument of national policy. We seek a foreign policy that respects and advances the right to human life, religious liberty, and the enhancement of human dignity throughout the world, especially through economic assistance."

The cardinals lamented that debate on America's moral direction is stymied by partisan and narrow interests, and pledged to promote the higher moral vision articulated by Pope Leo in their preaching and advocacy.

"As pastors entrusted with the teaching of our people, we cannot stand by while decisions are made that condemn millions to lives trapped permanently at the edge of existence," Cardinal Cupich said.

Cardinal McElroy said that Catholic social teaching "testifies that when national interest narrowly conceived excludes the moral imperative of solidarity among nations and the dignity of the human person, it brings immense suffering to the world and a catastrophic assault on the just peace that benefits every nation and is the will of God."

Cardinal Tobin stressed that Pope Leo's vision for global justice and peace is vital.

"Otherwise, escalating threats and armed conflict risk destroying international relations and plunging the world into incalculable suffering," he said.

The cardinals' statement came a day after Archbishop Timothy Broglio of the US Archdiocese for the Military Services said in a BBC interview that soldiers who are Catholic could in good conscience disobey orders to participate in an invasion of Greenland.

Church in Sri Lanka working to 'keep hope alive' after devastating floods

COLOMBO (LICAS NEWS): The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka has mobilised nationwide humanitarian and pastoral support to assist communities in recovering from the deadly floods caused by Cyclone Ditwah, which killed more than 600 people and affected millions late last year [*Sunday Examiner*, 7 December 2025].

The death toll exceeded 600, with a total of 2.3 million people affected and at least one million in need of assistance.

"The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka is making a significant contribution to rekindling hope," Father Basil Rohan Fernando, national director of the Pontifical Mission Societies in Colombo, said in a report by Fides.

More than 20 per cent of the country was affected by the tropical storm, which damaged homes, businesses, roads, bridges and power grids.

Government figures show that about 720,000 buildings were destroyed, along with 16,000 kilometres of roads, 278 kilometres of railway tracks and 480 bridges.

"We were suddenly struck by a new, severe crisis. In addition to the short-term effects, this will



also entail medium- to long-term costs, as reconstruction will take time," the priest said.

He said Catholic communities across Sri Lanka have taken on a sustained role in responding to both immediate needs and long-term recovery.

"In this situation, the Catholic community in Sri Lanka has become involved and is com-

mitted to a single goal: to instill new hope. We have assumed a special responsibility, namely to keep hope alive," he said.

"This is being done by supporting many people with material, financial, but also spiritual, psychological, and social assistance, as was the case during the Christmas season and continues to be the case today," the priest added.

A woman carries a child near a landslide-affected area in the aftermath of Cyclone Ditwah, in Maspanna on 13 December 2025. Photo: UCAN/Ishara Kodikara

Father Fernando said the government has intensified reconstruction and social assistance efforts, including rebuilding roads, bridges, railway lines and schools, while supporting affected individuals and families whose communities are beginning to receive tangible state assistance.

He said social assistance has focused on the most vulnerable, with households that lost homes or livelihoods receiving five million rupees in government subsidies.

"Public subsidies have reached families with school-age children so they can purchase new school

supplies and resume classes," he said.

Father Fernando said the government led by Anura Kumara Dissanayake has shown strong commitment to recovery efforts and expressed gratitude for international financial support, including assistance from Caritas organizations, adding that affected communities do not feel abandoned.

Government estimates place the cost of reconstruction at about US\$7 billion, equivalent to roughly seven per cent of Sri Lanka's gross domestic product and nearly half of government revenue in 2025.

The disaster struck as the country was emerging from the 2022 economic collapse linked to a debt crisis, while debt restructuring was underway with support from the International Monetary Fund.

Pope calls for service to the marginalised in message for Fiesta Señor in the Philippines

MANILA (LICAS NEWS): In a message marking the 461st Fiesta Señor celebrations in the Philippines, Pope Leo XIV urged Catholics to live out their baptism through service, particularly to marginalised communities.

In his message, addressed to the Augustinian community of the Minor Basilica of Santo Niño in Cebu, Pope Leo expressed hope that the feast would inspire the faithful "to embrace the baptismal call to live a grace-filled life in Christ and in service to your brothers and sisters, especially those on the margins of society."

The pope said the annual celebration, themed "In Santo Niño we are one," should be "an opportunity to grow in appreciation of the sacramental grace of baptism that incorporates us into Christ, and thus makes us children of God and members of his Church."

Pope Leo added that witness through service would enable the faithful "to bear greater witness to Christ's call to unity and



Devotees lift images of the Child Jesus during Feast of Santo Niño celebrations at the Minor Basilica and Archdiocesan Shrine of Santo Niño de Tondo in Manila on January 18. Photo: Angie de Silva.

reflect the life of charity of the Most Holy Trinity [cf. John 17:21-23]."

Fiesta Señor is marked by large public devotions across the Philippines, including celebrations at the Minor Basilica of Santo Niño de Tondo, one of the country's oldest centres of devotion to the Child Jesus.

The pope commended those gathered for the celebrations to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, and imparted his Apostolic Blessing "as a sign of joy and hope in the Lord."

The message was conveyed by Pietro Cardinal Parolin, Vatican secretary of state.

Ecumenism is a tool for peace, says cardinal

VATICAN (SE): Christians across the globe are marking the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, observed from January 18 to 25.

Kurt Cardinal Koch, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, spoke to Vatican News about the significance of the Christian mission to pursue unity.

When asked about Pope Leo XIV's appeal for unity and a commitment to world peace to work "hand in hand," Cardinal Koch emphasised the vital role of Christian Churches in fostering unity.

"Ecumenism can assist society if it does not mirror society's discord, but is rather itself a sign of unity," the cardinal explained.

In a world full of opposing currents, Christians are challenged to live "in one Spirit" despite diversity.

"If Christianity itself is a divided heap, then it cannot offer society very much," Cardinal Koch said, warning of the repercussions of division within the faith, according to Vatican News.

This year's texts for the Week of Prayer were prepared by the Armenian Apostolic Church, based on St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling."

Cardinal Koch described the choice of this text as highly symbolic.

"It is a passionate appeal by St. Paul for unity," the cardinal said. "When you consider that Paul wrote this letter from prison, we see how serious it is for him. In prison you don't occupy yourself with trivialities."

Looking ahead to the 500th anniversary of the Confessio Augustana [Augsburg Confession] in 2030, he dismissed the idea of setting fixed timetables for ecumenical progress.

"In ecumenism, I do not name deadlines. The deadlines are set by the Holy Spirit, not by us," the cardinal remarked.

However, Cardinal Koch added that the year 2030 remains an important "point for reflection" to reconsider how divisions might be overcome.

He referenced theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg, who saw the division of the Church as a "failure" of the Reformation, noting that Martin Luther had sought the renewal of all Christianity.

"Jesus wanted one Church, not a variety of Churches," the cardinal asserted.

In conclusion, he underscored the enduring relevance of the Council of Nicaea, which was recently commemorated on its 1,700th anniversary.

Unity, Cardinal Koch affirmed, can only be found in the common faith of Christians. "The challenge of Nicaea remains relevant."

Church must act as conscience against 'tolerated evils,' says Philippine bishop



Bishop Alminaza delivers his homily during the 'Hayuma: Mending the Broken' convergence at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila on January 16.

Photo: LiCAS News/Mark Z. Saludes

MANILA (LICAS NEWS): "Many evils persist not because they are hidden, but because they are tolerated," said Bishop Gerardo Alminaza of San Carlos, the Philippines, adding that "indifference allows injustice to endure."

Bishop Alminaza, president of Caritas Philippines, was speaking at the "Hayuma: Mending the Broken" convergence at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila on January 15.

The bishop said that poverty, environmental destruction, and economic exclusion persist not because they are unavoidable, but because they have become socially acceptable.

He said that repeated exposure to suffering risks numbing both the public conscience and faith communities. "The greatest threat is not outrage but indifference," he said, describing a society that "grows used to suffering."

The three-day gathering, held from January 14 to 16, brought together Church leaders, climate advocates, labour groups, people's organisations, and sectoral representatives to address inter-

connected social crises through dialogue grounded in Catholic social teaching and the lived realities of Filipinos.

...economic exclusion persists not because it is unavoidable, but because it has become socially acceptable

In his address, Bishop Alminaza linked environmental degradation to systemic decisions that heighten vulnerability, particularly among poor and marginalised communities. He noted that economic exclusion persists not because it is unavoidable, but because it has become socially acceptable.

"If we only respond after disaster, we silently accept that disaster is inevitable," he said, stressing that integral ecology requires addressing the conditions that repeatedly expose com-

munities to harm.

The bishop also challenged economic narratives that equate growth with justice, noting that inequality and insecurity persist even during periods of expansion. "Growth alone is not proof of justice," he said, pointing to labour arrangements that leave many workers poor despite long hours of work.

Alluding to scripture, he added that "wages withheld from workers cry out to God."

Turning inward, Bishop Alminaza warned that faith communities themselves risk complicity when they avoid economic, ecological, or governance issues.

"Silence in the face of injustice is not neutrality. It allows harm to continue," the bishop said.

He emphasised that the Church's role is not to replace political institutions, but to serve as a moral guide.

"The Church is not called to replace political institutions, but she is called to be a conscience," he said.

Bishop Alminaza encouraged participants to move beyond charity towards collective transformation, saying, "Love that remains at the level of individual compassion is not enough."

The bishop added, "We are called not only to mend what has been torn, but to confront why it keeps tearing," calling on the Church and civil society to refuse "tolerated evils" and to walk with affected communities in the struggle for justice.



Major Archbishop Thattil. Photo: AsiaNews

Syro-Malabar Synod urges action on declining population and 'reckless' migration

KOCHI (ASIANEWS): The opening session of the 34th Synod of the Syro-Malabar Church concluded at Mount St Thomas, Ernakulam, with leaders issuing an urgent call to tackle the dwindling population and growing migration concerns.

On January 10, Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil issued a post-synodal circular announcing the launch of a "Year for the Strengthening of the Community". He encouraged the faithful to bravely confront the challenges presented by modern society.

The Major Archbishop Thattil's circular highlighted concerns about "reckless migration" abroad, cautioning that this often results in considerable debts and erosion of faith.

"The alarming rate of migration to foreign countries by members of the community is leading some to significant indebtedness, while their absence is felt by the Church in India," the major archbishop said. He urged Christians to take action to address economic challenges.

The Syro-Malabar Church called on its members to recognise their potential as innovators and employers, rather than limiting themselves to seeking jobs. The Church noted that, although working in the field is often seen as unprofitable, successful examples of advanced agriculture in several dioceses have created significant employment opportunities.

The synod reaffirmed the importance of active involvement in public life. The circular asserted that participating in public administration and politics is a "civic duty" for Syro-Malabar Church members, emphasising that "vigilance is the price of democracy."

The synod reaffirmed the importance of active involvement in public life

It said that the Year for Community Strengthening is not simply a commemorative event but a campaign to renew all spheres of public life according to Christian principles.

In an interview with a Malayalam-language media outlet, Father Tom Olikkarott, head of public relations for the Syro-Malabar Church, said, "We must seriously address the fact that the birth rate is declining. More than just a reduction in our representation, the community is facing the risk of disappearing."

He added, "One of the main concerns is that as young people migrate to foreign countries, there is no one left to care for the elderly. In addition, many of the new generation do not want to marry and have children. But the family is the fundamental unit of society, and its progressive reduction is alarming. We need larger families that promote responsible parenthood. The Church has been and remains committed to supporting families who struggle to raise their children through various programmes and scholarships."

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Asia tops global list for Christian persecution, report finds



Christians were attacked during Christmas season in India. Photo: RVA News/Persecution.org

(LICAS NEWS/RVA NEWS): Asia remains the world's most dangerous region for Christians, with two in every five believers living under high, very high, or extreme levels of persecution, according to the World Watch List 2026 released by Open Doors International, *LiCAS News* reported on January 15.

The report estimates that over 181 million Christians in Asia face serious persecution or discrimination because of their faith, making the region the largest contributor to the global total of more than 388 million persecuted Christians.

In comparison, one in five Christians in Africa and one in seven worldwide experience similar levels of pressure.

According to *RVA News*, Cristian Nani, director of Open Doors, described the situation as "deeply alarming," stating, "This is once again a record year." He noted that more than half of those affected are women and girls, while 110 million are children under the age of 15. The report also highlighted an increase in killings—from 4,476 to 4,849—an average of 13 deaths per day.

Open Doors identified 15 countries where persecution has reached an "extreme" level, up from 13 last year. Several of these

countries are in Asia, including North Korea, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Myanmar, and Yemen, with North Korea remaining the most dangerous country globally.

Christians in South and Southeast Asia face increasing discrimination, surveillance, and violence—often intensified by political instability, religious nationalism, and weak protection for minorities, according to *RVA News*.

As Christianity continues to grow across the Global South, the report underscores a painful reality: where the Church is growing, it is often suffering most

Unlike other regions where violence is the primary driver, *LiCAS News* reported that the World Watch List showed persecution in Asia is increasingly characterised by state control, legal restrictions, surveillance, and social pressure, rather than mass killings.

Christian converts and ethnic minority believers are identified as the most vulnerable groups across Asia. Converts from Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism face family rejection, social exclusion, and legal penalties, while ethnic minority Christians experience discrimination linked to both

faith and identity, particularly in parts of East and Southeast Asia.

Globally, the report documents a worsening situation for Christians. Of the 388 million Christians living under high levels of persecution or discrimination, 315 million are concentrated in the 50 countries on the World Watch List, according to *LiCAS News*.

During the reporting period, 4,849 Christians were killed for faith-related reasons, 4,712 were detained, and 3,632 churches or Christian properties were attacked.

While Africa continues to account for the majority of killings due to militant violence and weak state protection, Asia's role is defined by the breadth and intensity of systematic pressure, affecting daily life, family relations, community participation, national citizenship, and church activity.

For Asian Churches, the findings are a call not only to awareness but to prayer, advocacy, and solidarity. As Christianity continues to grow across the Global South, the report underscores a painful reality: where the Church is growing, it is often suffering most, *RVA News* reported.

The World Watch List 2026 is based on research covering the period from 1 October 2024 to 30 September 2025, using a scoring system measuring both violence and pressure across five spheres of Christian life.

The findings underline Asia's central place in the global landscape of religious persecution, even as the phenomenon continues to expand worldwide.



Our Lady of Arabia. Photo: Vatican Media

Kuwait's oldest Catholic church elevated to minor basilica

KUWAIT (AGENCIES): In a historic development for the Catholic community in the Gulf, Pietro Cardinal Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, arrived in Kuwait on January 15 to preside over the elevation of the Church of Our Lady of Arabia in Ahmadi to the status of minor basilica, according to *Fides*.

Pope Leo XIV conferred the title on 28 June 2025, recognising the church's historical and spiritual significance as the oldest Catholic church in both Kuwait and the Gulf region, Vatican News reported.

Upon arrival, Cardinal Parolin was welcomed at the airport by Archbishop Eugene Martin Nugent, the apostolic nuncio; Bishop Aldo Berardi, the apostolic vicar of Northern Arabia; Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Sabah, prime minister of Kuwait; and priests of the vicariate.

During his first day in Kuwait, the cardinal met with priests and religious at the Holy Family Co-Cathedral, conveying greetings and encouragement from Pope Leo XIV and expressing gratitude for their dedication, often carried out far from home and amid challenging circumstances.

"The Lord does not look for perfect priests, but humble hearts," he said, urging them to be "priests of love, not of perfection; priests who are joyful because we know we are chosen and loved by the Lord."

Later that day, Cardinal Parolin led Mass at the co-cathedral to commemorate the 65th anniversary of its consecration, describing it as "an authentic meeting place of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, a safe harbour, and a place of peace and harmony."

He subsequently greeted representatives of various Christian Churches and communities in the Gulf, ahead of an upcoming ecumenical meeting marking the Week of Prayer for Christian Uni-

ty, *Vatican News* reported.

"Built upon the sands of the desert," Cardinal Parolin said on January 16, during the Mass, for the elevation of the church to the status of Minor Basilica.

"This basilica reminds us that Mary herself once found refuge in those same desert lands, where she cared for, raised, and safeguarded the one Mediator between God and the human family, Jesus Christ," he said.

Cardinal Parolin described the occasion as "truly historic," not only "for the Church in Kuwait, but for the Church throughout the entire Arabian Peninsula."

The history of Ahmadi's 'mother church' dates back to 1948, when a former power station was converted into a chapel and the first Mass was celebrated on the Feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In the same year, Father Theophano Stella was appointed the first resident priest in Kuwait, later becoming the country's first apostolic vicar.

In 1952, the Kuwait Oil Company granted permission for the construction of a new church in Ahmadi, which would become known as the 'mother church' of the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia, encompassing Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia.

The cornerstone of the church was blessed by Pope Pius XII before being sent to Kuwait. The foundation stone was laid on 8 September 1955, and the church was consecrated to Our Lady of Arabia in April 1956.

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Notice Board



Translating faith into action...



Faith is the foundation of my services, actions, and personal growth. I always focus on what God teaches us and what he wants me to do. I find happiness after the trials during my service as a church member. I need to sacrifice everything because serving for the glory of God makes the effort worthwhile. Simple charity also gives me inner happiness. I've experienced personal growth; I feel I now have wisdom and inner peace, along with God's blessings for my family and the people I love and pray for. — **Lilibeth Abaya**

My faith fuels my everyday relationship with God. The more I nurture my faith, the closer I feel to him, igniting my desire to serve through others. Serving others wholeheartedly is not always easy, but my faith keeps me going, teaching me to serve unceasingly with humility. The more I serve, the closer I feel to God.

— **Daisy Bisiang**



Faith is action. When we believe, expect, and trust something is true, we act on it. With our faith in Jesus, if we trust him and his promises, we will take action by praying, praising, listening, and loving. Only then can we experience the blessings that come from our active trust. — **Lennie Calis**

To deepen my faith, I joined a choir group in the church. I now commit my time to service, prioritising it over socialising with friends. Our church activities, like adoration, prayer meetings, and Bible study, have helped me know the Lord more and understand his teachings. I've learned that faith should manifest in our actions. With prayers, I believe we can lead meaningful lives on Earth.

— **Irish Escobar**



"Faith without action is dead"—this statement encapsulates how living faith transforms lives. I have many experiences transforming my faith into actions. Volunteering in the church and helping those in need brings me joy. I never tire of charitable work, especially within my Apostleship of Prayer family in Hong Kong, as it allows me to translate my faith into meaningful action.

— **Dolores Go**

As a member of the Apostleship of Prayer, I integrate my faith into daily practices like praying the Morning Offering and the Pope's monthly intentions. I express my faith in community by treating others with kindness and patience. At St. Joseph's Church, I volunteer my time for small acts of kindness, which continually transform and strengthen my faith. — **Maria Labrador**



I translate my faith into action by being obedient to the Church's spiritual teachings and serving others, particularly my family, employer, and community at St. Joseph's Church. I approach life positively, serving without expecting anything in return. God knows my faith and desire to help, and dealing with others with understanding and humility aids my personal growth.

— **Evangeline Reyes**

So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

— **James 2:17**

Embracing an experimental mindset

Life is like an experiment, especially as we set new goals for the New Year. To move forward, we start with an idea, like "I want to achieve this." It's normal for our expectations to differ from reality, but this doesn't mean we should give up.

Failures can be stepping stones to success. Just as researchers face setbacks in their experiments, we may need to try several times before we succeed. Often, encountering a few failures is part of the process, allowing us to adjust our approach and learn along the way.

In every aspect of life—work, relationships, or personal growth—having a guiding hypothesis helps us navigate challenges. When one method doesn't work, it paves the way for exploring new strategies. Life's unpredictability keeps things interesting and encourages us to adapt.

As we step into the New Year, let's embrace this experimental mindset. Each goal is an opportunity to learn and grow, even if we face setbacks. Ultimately, these experiences can bring us closer to our happiness. Remember, failures can be gifts from God, that lead us to fulfillment.

Gloria Ruiz



Let it be

Let it be, when clouds churn gray,
Every storm will break someday.
In the echo of silent nights,
Take a moment,
just close your eyes.

Every tear that falls anew,
Carves a path to something true.
Though the road may twist and bend,
Hope will rise and love won't end.

With raw emotion, feel the pain,
It washes over like summer rain.
Yet in the depths, you'll find a spark,
A whisper guiding through the dark.

Rise above the weight you bear,
Feel the freedom in the air.
Let go of burdens, let dreams soar,
The heart knows well what it longs for.

In the forest, through the leaves,
Tender moments, the spirit believes.
Every moment of dawn is quietness,
Reminds us of our sacred place.

So when life's trials pull you down,
Remember strength is found, not crown.
With every heartbeat, every plea,
Find your solace—just let it be.

Trust the rhythm of the rhyme,
For every ending births new time.
In the stillness,
let your worries cease,
In the journey, discover peace.

— **Melchie Guihama**





YOUR DAILY MASS GUIDE

JANUARY 25 – THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY

TIME. Mass of the day, *Gloria, Creed*, preface of Sundays (green).

Readings:

Isaiah 8:23b–9:3;

1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17;

Matthew 4:12-23.

JANUARY 26 – ST. TIMOTHY & TITUS.

Mass of the memorial (white).

Readings:

2 Timothy 1:1-8 or Titus 1:1-5;

Luke 10:1-9.

JANUARY 27 – TUESDAY:

THIRD WEEK IN

ORDINARY TIME. Mass of the day (green).

Readings:

2 Samuel 6:12b-15, 17-19;

Mark 3:31-35.

JANUARY 28 – ST. THOMAS

AQUINAS. Mass of the memorial (white).

Readings:

2 Samuel 7:4-17; Mark 4:1-20.

JANUARY 29 – ST. JOSEPH

FREINADEMETZ. Mass of the memorial (white).

Readings:

2 Samuel 7:18-19, 24-29;

Mark 4:21-25.

JANUARY 30 – BLESSED

GABRIELE MARIA

ALLEGRA. Mass of the memorial (white).

Readings:

2 Samuel 11:1-4a, 5-10a, 13-17;

Mark 4:26-34.

JANUARY 31 – ST. JOHN

BOSCO. Mass of the memorial (white). Readings:

2 Samuel 12:1-7a, 10-17;

Mark 4:35-41.

Apostleship of Prayer

Themes for January 2026

FOR PRAYER WITH THE WORD OF GOD

For educators

Let us pray that praying with the Word of God be nourishment for our lives and a source of hope in our communities, helping us to build a more fraternal and missionary Church.

Third Sunday of the Year

When the Word walks among us

On this Sunday of the Word of God, the Church invites us to pause, listen, and let the Word of Christ dwell deeply within us (Col 3:16). The Word we celebrate today is not a distant voice from the past. It is alive, dynamic, and close — a Word that walks, calls, and heals.

Matthew tells us that Jesus begins his public ministry not in the grand city of Jerusalem but in the humble region of Galilee, “the land of the shadow of death.” It is there, in a borderland of mixed peoples and weary hearts, that the light shines most brightly. God’s Word chooses to dwell among the ordinary, the overlooked, and the struggling. Capernaum, a modest fishing village, becomes the first pulpit of the Gospel. It reminds us that the Word of God seeks spaces where hope is dim to make faith come alive.

Jesus begins with a message as

brief as it is life-changing: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Repentance is not merely sorrow for sin but a new way of seeing — a change of heart and attitudes. When the Word enters our lives, it enables us to think differently, to reorder our values according to God’s heart. The kingdom is near not because we have climbed to heaven, but because heaven has come to meet us in Jesus — the Word made flesh.

Then, the living Word walks along the shores of Galilee and calls fishermen — Peter, Andrew, James, and John. His simple invitation, “Come after me,” transforms their work and their world. Notice that Jesus does not command them

to abandon their public lives, but to reorient it. Fishing remains their trade, but people become their catch.

Their nets — symbols of what entangles or limits us — are left behind. Today, the word “net” can also refer to the virtual net that strangles and chokes us, much like fish caught in a net with no way out. True discipleship begins when we drop the nets of fear, routine, and self-centeredness, and trust the voice that calls us to something greater.

Jesus’ mission unfolds in three actions: teaching, proclaiming, and healing. He teaches because truth liberates. He proclaims because good news must be shared. He heals because love restores what sin has

wounded. The Word of God, then, is not mere information but transformation; it illuminates our minds, renews our hearts, and empowers our hands for service.

As we celebrate the Sunday of the Word of God, the words of Pope Francis is worth recalling: “The Word must not remain on a bookshelf or in a liturgical book alone — it must live among us.” Every time we read Scripture, proclaim it at Mass, or live its message with mercy and justice, the light of Christ shines anew in our own time.

Let us, then, open our hearts to the Word that dwells among us — not as an echo of the past, but as the living voice of Christ who still walks our shores, calling us by name, saying: “Come, follow me.”

• **Father Josekutty Mathew CMF**



Sumunod kay Kristo!

Sa paglalakad ni Hesus sa tabi ng Lawa ng Galilea, nakita niya ang dalawang mangingisda, si Simon na tinatawag na Pedro, at ang kapatid niyang si Andres. Sila’y naghahagis ng lambat. Sinabi niya sa kanila, “Sumunod kayo sa akin, at gagawin ko kayong mamamalakaya ng mga tao.” Noon di’y iniwan nila ang kanilang mga lambat at sumunod kay Hesus.” (Mt. 4: 18-20).

Sa pamamagitan ng ating binyag, tayo ay naging mga anak ng Diyos at tagasunod kay Kristo. Ang pagtawag ni Simon at Andres ay nagpapaalala sa atin na tayong lahat ay tinawag upang sumunod kay Kristo. Ang pagsunod kay Kristo ay ang pakikinig sa kanyang banal na aral at maging saksi sa kanyang kabutihan. Tinawag tayo upang tularan si Kristo sa pamumuhay sa kabanalan at pagsunod sa kalooban

ng Diyos sa ating buhay. Dahil ang pagsunod sa kalooban ng Diyos ay daan upang maghari ang Diyos sa ating buhay.

Ang pagsunod ng mga magkapatid na sina Simon at Andres at ang magkapatid na Santiago at Juan ay hindi madali. Ito’y nangangahulugan ng sakripisyo. Sinabi ng ating ebanghelyo; “Tinawag din sila ni Hesus. Agad nilang iniwan ang bangka at ang kanilang ama, at sumunod kay Hesus.” (Mt. 4:22). Hindi madali iwanan ang siguradong kabuhayan, at hindi madali iwanan ang mga mahal sa buhay. Pero ginawa nila ito dahil alam nila na ang pagsunod kay Hesus ang tunay na magbibigay sa kanila ng kasaganaan at kaayusan sa

buhay. Ang pagsunod kay Hesus ay hindi pagtalikod sa ating pamilya. Ito ay isang pagsasakripisyo para sa kaharian ng Diyos. Hindi pababayaang ni Hesus ang ama nila Santiago at Juan. Ang pagsunod kay Hesus ay isang sakripisyo upang mapabanal ang kanilang buhay.

Natatakot tayo na mag-alay ng ating oras o panahon para sa simbahan. Iniisip ng iba na sayang ang “day-off” kung ang buong araw ay nasa paglilingkod sa simbahan. Hindi sayang ang iyong oras o panahon kung ito ay inialay mo sa Panginoon. Bagkus, lalo kang pagpapalain ng Panginoon dahil inuuna mo Siya sa iyong buhay. Ang mga alagad ay pinagpala dahil sila’y sumunod kay Hesus. Nawa’y atin

silang tularan, sina Simon, na handang magsakripisyo para sundin ang kalooban ng Diyos.

May mga kababayan tayong nagsakripisyo para sa kanilang pamilya, nag-OFW para suportahan ang pamilya. At noong sila’y nakaramdam ng tawag ng Panginoon, iniwan ang trabaho at pumasok sa kumbento para tumugon sa tawag ng Panginoon sa pagmamadre. Iniwan ang kanilang pamilya para sa Panginoon. Hindi ito madali, pero ito ay isang sakripisyo upang papurihan ang Panginoon. Natagpuan nila ang tunay na ligaya at kapayapaan sa pamamagitan ng pagsunod sa kalooban ng Diyos.

Ang tunay na kaligayahan at kapayapaan ay ang pagsunod kay Kristo!

• **Father Jay Flandez SVD**

Behold your mother with love and confidence

When God grants us sanctifying grace through baptism, we gain a share in his divine life. The spirit of God fills our hearts (Romans 5:5), transforming them into reflections of the eternal Son (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:18). The Spirit replicates Christ’s sonship within us (cf. Romans 8:15), helping us worship the Father “in spirit and truth” (John 4:24).

This transformation occurs gradually, much like the growth of a seed. The grace God plants in our hearts evolves with time as the Spirit completes the image of Christ within us. Our hearts learn to trust the Father and develop a love for God and our neighbours.

Often, we may feel as if little is occurring within us, especially during difficult times. While we endure various sufferings, our transformation through grace does not eliminate our struggles; instead, it changes our hearts amidst them.

A profound example from Scripture is St. John. Initially a disciple of Jesus, he later became his friend. St. John, known as the beloved disciple, experienced the closeness of Jesus at the Last Supper. He remained steadfast at the foot of the cross when all others fled, witnessing Christ’s crucifixion — a deeply painful moment. Yet, amid this suffering, he received an extraordinary grace.

When Jesus saw his mother and John, he said, “Woman, behold, your son,” and to John, “Behold, your mother” (John 19:26-27). Here, Jesus entrusted his mother to St. John, inviting him to embrace her as



FAITH ALIVE!

like Nicodemus or the woman at the well, he also speaks to us. His words are universal, including his call to every believer, “Behold, your mother,” which serves as an invitation to relate to Mary with love and trust.

After Jesus’ resurrection, the disciples gathered with Mary for prayer (cf. Acts 1:14). Christian tradition depicts this scene with Mary at the centre, surrounded by the disciples as they receive the Holy Spirit. This gathering spirit has lasted through the centuries, as seen in ancient hymns like “Sub Tuum,” dating back to as early as the second century, expressing confidence in Mary’s intercession for us.

Mary knows the significance of grace in our lives and the workings of the Holy Spirit within us. Her role as our spiritual mother extends to our growth in grace from baptism through to the Eucharist. Every Communion we receive energises our spiritual lives, fostering our relationship with God.

When we recognise Mary as our mother, it becomes natural to seek her intercession, asking her to “Entreat your Son our God to save our souls.” We find comfort in entrusting our lives to her care, knowing that she is dedicated to guiding our journey in faith.

• **Father James Dominic Brent OSV News**
Abridged by SE

Shung Tak and Operation Santa Claus join hands to support community

HONG KONG (SE): Charity and community spirit once again swept through the campus of Shung Tak Catholic English College this festive season, as the school celebrated the conclusion of another highly successful edition of Operation Santa Claus.

Now in its 31st year supporting the fundraising tradition, the school's recent efforts generated substantial funds for Operation Santa Claus and for victims of the Wang Fuk Court Fire. Part of this year's proceeds will be directed to the Caritas Hong Kong fundraising appeal, supporting those affected by the fire. In doing so, the school demonstrates its ongoing commitment to Catholic values of love, compassion, and service.

This year's fundraising total reached a record-breaking HK\$123,988.80. Of this, HK\$20,000 has been pledged to Operation Santa Claus 2025, while the remainder will support Caritas Hong Kong's relief efforts for fire victims.

The campaign combined creativity with a strong sense of purpose. Alongside a Dress Casual Day, the annual fair featured stalls run by students, teachers, and parents, creating a lively festive atmosphere. Christmas craft stalls and a card-writing initiative—where students wrote messages of support for fire victims and expressed gratitude to first responders—further enhanced the occasion.

Assistant principal, Graham Manchester, oversaw the fundraising supported by Janice Wu and Connor Nightingale. Together, they guided the student-led Operation Santa Claus Organising Committee to ensure smooth operations throughout the campaign.

Each year, the school highlights a specific Operation Santa Claus beneficiary, helping students learn about and actively support their work. This year's focus was the Love 21 Foundation, which supports individuals with Down syndrome and autism.



The initiative aligns seamlessly with the school's core values, offering students an opportunity to engage with the wider community and support those less fortunate. The school takes pride in making a meaningful contribution to society and in seeing its students exemplify the ethos of true "Shungtakians."

A hallmark of Shung Tak's approach is its emphasis on student leadership and empowerment.

The school's Operation Santa Claus committee now operates under student leadership, a development Manchester views with great pride, as he sees students grow in confidence, skill, and compassion throughout the process.

Committee chairperson, Chloe Chan [5M], described the project as a lesson in collabora-

tive leadership, noting it encouraged her to think more critically, listen actively, and work with others to reach the best possible outcomes.

Lucas Cheung [4L] emphasised the importance of teamwork, sharing that his role in the committee taught him to delegate tasks effectively and value each member's contribution. The experience, he said, boosted his confidence and helped him recognise how diverse strengths can enhance group success.

Natalie Tse [5L], who managed the committee's communications, described the experience as transformative. She said it broadened her horizons, improved her confidence in communicating with various teams and committees, and expanded her social circle.

Shung Tak Catholic English College's longstanding partnership with Operation Santa Claus exemplifies the aims of Catholic education: shaping academically competent and compassionate leaders, ready to serve others.

This year's campaign stands as a testament to faith in action, as the school continues to nurture a generation of conscientious and generous citizens.



Photo: Fides

Sixty-one new deacons ordained in Vietnam

HUE (FIDES) "You yourselves will become the connectors of unity, faith, and hope in the ministry of the proclamation of the Word of God, as well as manifest the values of the vocation in the lives of the clergy today," Archbishop Joseph Dang Duc Ngan of Hue, central Vietnam, told 21 candidates for the diaconate during their ordination Mass, on the Feast of the Mother of God, January 1, at Phu Cam Cathedral.

Archbishop Joseph exhorted the ordinands: "When you are motivated by sincere love for Christ and lead a life of perfect piety in this state, you will be more easily bonded to Christ with an undivided heart; you will be free to serve God and humanity; and you will be more inclined to help people be reborn, be rooted, and be built up in the faith. Do not lose faith in the gospel, for you are not merely listeners, but ministers of the gospel, and you have to maintain the mystery of the faith in an upright conscience."

He reminded the new deacons that their ministry calls for unwavering dedication, urging them to be steadfast in both word and deed, so they may inspire and guide others along the path of faith.

On the same day, Bishop Peter Huynh Van Hai of the Diocese of Vinh Long ordained 12 seminarians as deacons at Vinh Long Cathedral in the far south of Vietnam. During the Mass, Bishop Peter called upon the faithful to pray for peace in a world still marked by war, suffering, and death.

Addressing the ordinands, he prayed that God would bless them abundantly, granting them the grace to remain faithful and to persevere in their vocation as they follow the Lord.

Also in southern Vietnam, an ordination Mass was celebrated for 20 seminarians from St. Joseph's Seminary took place at Notre Dame Cathedral, in the heart of Ho Chi Minh City, on the morning of January 8.

Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Bui Cong Trac of the Archdiocese

'Do not lose faith in the gospel, for you are not merely listeners, but ministers of the gospel, and you have to maintain the mystery of the faith in an upright conscience'

of Saigon, who presided over the Mass, emphasised: "The diaconate that these seminarians are about to receive is very noble, not only a blessing for themselves and their families, but also a blessing for the Church. The ordination is not a destination or a stopping point, but a continuous journey forward."

He continued: "To bring salvation to others, do not forget the grace you have received through the laying on of hands by the bishop; you must diligently study and teach catechism. You have to set a good example for the Catholic faithful in your words, your behaviour, as well as your charity, your faith, and your purity."

On the same morning in Vietnam's most populous city, Bishop John Baptist Nguyen Huy Bac of the Diocese of Ban Me Thuot ordained eight deacons and nine priests from the Society of the Divine Word at Phu Trung Church.

The theme for the 2026 Pastoral Year of the Church in Vietnam, "Every Christian is a missionary disciple," invites all believers to embrace their identity and mission.

The Vietnamese Bishops' Conference encourages Christians to share the gospel in their homeland through prayer, study of the Word of God, and authentic witness in daily life.

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Climate change: inaction on clean energy risks catastrophe

John Singarayar, UCAN

The Earth is speaking to us through rising temperatures, melting ice, and increasingly violent storms. Yet we continue to delay, locked in a dangerous cycle of inaction.

New research from Fudan University in China reveals something deeply troubling about our collective response to climate change: waiting for the crisis to worsen will not strengthen our resolve to act. Instead, it may destroy the very motivation we need to save ourselves.

Pope Francis warned us in *Laudato Si'* that “the Earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth.” He called for an ecological conversion, a fundamental change in how we relate to Creation and to each other.

But conversion requires more than prayer and good intentions. It demands immediate, concrete action before we cross a threshold from which there is no return.

The research presents a sobering mathematical reality. Scientists examined what happens when societies postpone transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy, using sophisticated modelling that accounts for economic constraints, technological limitations, and the mounting costs of climate damage.

What they discovered challenges a comfortable assumption that many governments have embraced: that as climate disasters intensify, the economic case for action will naturally strengthen, eventually forcing us to change course.

The opposite appears to be true. The study finds that the social cost of carbon, which measures the economic damage from each tonne of carbon dioxide released, does initially rise as temperatures climb. However, once climate damages exceed a critical threshold—somewhere around 10 per cent of global economic output—this cost begins to collapse.



A flooded street in Malabon, in the National Capital Region of the Philippines, brought about by fiercer storms and neglected flood control infrastructure. Photo: Tear Cordez

The economy becomes so weakened by climate impacts that society lacks the resources and capacity to invest in the very solutions that could prevent further warming.

This creates a vicious cycle. Postponed action means renewable energy deployment remains sluggish. As damages mount, the economy contracts, making the

transition to clean energy even more difficult and expensive. Eventually, the incentive to act at all disappears.

The research shows that if we wait until after 2050 to begin serious mitigation efforts, renewable energy might never reach the levels needed to stabilise the climate. The probability of limiting warming to two degrees Celsius drops below 10 per cent.

These are not merely technical projections. They represent real consequences for real people, especially the poor and vulnerable whom Pope Francis placed at the centre of our moral concern.

In *Laudato Si'*, he reminded us that “a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”

When we postpone climate action, we are not simply making an economic calculation. We are choosing to impose suffering on those least able to bear it.

The mathematics reveals another disturbing possibility: that we may be approaching what the researchers call a socio-economic tipping point.

Consider a coastal city that delays building seawalls and investing in clean energy. As flooding becomes routine, businesses close, tax revenue declines, and the city can no longer afford the infrastructure it once could have built.

The opportunity to adapt vanishes precisely when adaptation becomes most necessary. This same dynamic threatens entire nations and the global economy itself.

This is not inevitable. The research also shows that early action works. If serious mitigation had begun by 2025, renew-

able energy could have supplied 90 per cent of our needs by the century's end, holding climate damages to manageable levels.

The technology exists. The economic pathways are viable. What we lack is not capability but will.

Pope Francis called us to recognise that “the climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all.”

Our current trajectory violates this fundamental truth. By delaying action, wealthy nations are essentially stealing the future from today's children and from communities that have contributed least to the crisis. This is not just poor policy. It is a profound moral failure.

The study suggests establishing early-warning systems within international climate assessments to track when we might be approaching the danger zone. These would monitor both climate damages and renewable energy deployment rates, providing clear signals when society risks crossing into irreversible decline. Such mechanisms could give policymakers the information they need to act before it becomes too late.

But monitoring alone will not save us. We need courage to act now, when the costs are still manageable and the benefits are greatest. We need political leaders willing to resist the siren call of short-term thinking and fossil fuel interests. We need citizens demanding transformation rather than accepting incremental adjustments.

The research makes clear what many have long suspected: hope does not lie in waiting for future circumstances to force our hand. It lies in choosing, today, to align our economic systems with the integrity of creation.

Every year of delay makes the transition harder, more expensive, and ultimately less likely to succeed. The Earth will not wait for us to become comfortable with change. The question is whether we will act while action can still make a difference, or stand paralysed until paralysis itself becomes a catastrophe.

Pope ‘deeply saddened’ by deadly high-speed train collision in Spain

(OSV NEWS): Pope Leo XIV expressed his condolences to the families of victims of a devastating accident in which two high-speed trains collided in southern Spain's Andalusia region.

In a telegram sent on January 19 on the pope's behalf to Archbishop Luis Javier Argüello García of Valladolid, president of the Spanish Bishops' Conference, Pietro Cardinal Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, said Pope Leo was “deeply saddened to learn the painful news of the train accident in Adamuz” and offered “prayers for the eternal rest of the deceased.”

Cardinal Parolin wrote, “His Holiness conveys his heartfelt condolences to the families of the deceased, together with his expressions of comfort, spiritual closeness, and wishes for the speedy recovery of the injured.”

Invoking the intercession of Our Lady of the Pillar, patron of Spain, the pope encouraged rescue teams “to persevere in their efforts of relief and assistance.”

According to the Spanish newspaper El País, Spanish officials said 39 people died after a high-speed train traveling from Malaga to Madrid derailed in the evening of January 18 and fell onto another track, where

it collided with a train heading in the opposite direction toward the southern Spanish town of Huelva.

The tragic collision occurred in Adamuz, a town in the southern province of Córdoba.

As of January 19, 48 people remain hospitalised, 12 of whom were in critical condition, El País reported.

In a tweet posted to his X [formerly Twitter] account, Spanish Transportation minister, Óscar Puente, warned that the number of fatalities may continue to rise and expressed his gratitude to rescue teams working through the night.

Speaking to journalists at the accident site, Puente said the cause was unknown and that it was “extremely strange,” since the derailment occurred on a straight track renovated in May.

King Felipe, along with his wife and daughter, Queen Letizia and Princess Leonor, who were in Athens for the funeral of the king's aunt, Princess Irene of Greece, expressed his “devastation and concern” and said he would travel to Adamuz as soon as possible.

“I understand the desperation of the families and those injured who have suffered this accident,

and we are all truly worried. We hope they will recover as soon as possible,” he told journalists in the Greek capital.

The king also expressed his gratitude to the residents of Adamuz, who went out of their way to help survivors.

Spanish prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, tweeted his condolences to the victims' families, acknowledging that the accident was a cause of “profound sorrow for our country.”

José Cardinal Cobo of Madrid, expressed his sorrow and offered prayers for “the eternal rest of the victims, for the recovery of the injured, for their families, and for those who dedicate themselves to assistance efforts.”

Auxiliary Bishop Francisco César García Magán of Toledo, secretary general of the Spanish Bishops' Conference, wrote that he was “devastated” by the train accident and prayed for the victims and their families and for the quick recovery of those hospitalised.

Father Rafael Prados Godoy, parish priest of St. Andrew's Church in Adamuz, where the accident occurred, together with parishioners, immediately mobilised and opened the church's facilities to help those rescued.

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