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White House treating war like a video game 'sickening' says US cardinal

(OSV NEWS): Blase Cardinal Cupich of Chicago issued "a call to conscience," deploring efforts to "gamify" the US-Israel war with Iran—particularly by the Trump administration.

"A real war with real death and real suffering being treated like it's a video game— it's sickening," wrote Cardinal Cupich in a March 7 statement published on the archdiocese's website.

The cardinal pointed to a 42-second video posted on March 5 on the White House's X [formerly Twitter] account, which featured a mashup of action clips interspersed with unclassified video from US Central Command showing US missile strikes on Iran and secretary of War, Pete Hegseth.

The clip, captioned, "JUSTICE THE AMERICAN WAY," included scenes from films, video games, and television—such as "Iron Man," "Top Gun", "Halo", "Superman", and "Breaking Bad"—with a voiceover at the end declaring, "Flawless victory."

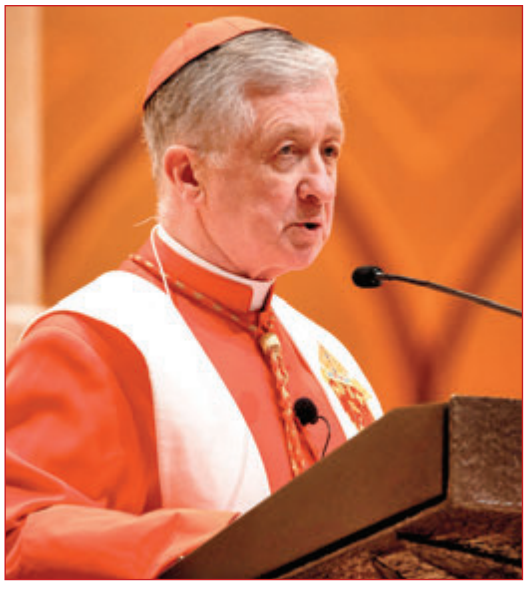
The war, launched by the US and Israel on February 28, has so far killed more than 1,200 people in Iran, including supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and several senior officials. At least 165, including a number of children, died at a school adjacent to an Iranian Revolutionary Guard base in Minab. Emerging footage indicates that the strike appears to have been initiated by the US.

With the war now engulfing multiple nations in the Middle East and sending shockwaves through the global economy, a further 400 people have reportedly been killed in Lebanon, and 11 in Israel.

Seven US soldiers have also been killed so far.

"Hundreds of people are dead, mothers and fathers, daughters and sons, including scores of children who made the fatal mistake of going to school that day," said Cardinal Cupich in his statement.





Above: People look on as smoke rises after reported Israeli airstrikes on Shahran fuel tanks in Tehran, Iran, on March 8.
Photo: OSV News/Majid Asgaripour, WANA via Reuters

Right: Cardinal Cupich speaks during an interreligious prayer service at Holy Name Cathedral in Chicago in 2025, commemorating the third anniversary of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine.
Photo: OSV News/Vincent Alban, Reuters

The cardinal added, "Hundreds of thousands displaced, and many millions more are terrified across the Middle East."

He emphasised that the fallen US soldiers "are also dishonoured" by the White House's social media post.

The cardinal stressed that the post was symptomatic of an even greater threat.

"This horrifying portrayal demonstrates that we now live in an era when the distance between the battlefield and the living room has been drastically reduced," he said. "The moral crisis we are facing is not just a matter of the war itself, but also how we, the observers, view violence, for war now has become a spectator sport or strategy game."

Cardinal Cupich observed that Kalshi—a prediction exchange market allowing participants to trade on the outcome of future events—faced a lawsuit from users unhappy with the company's decision to invoke a "death carveout" and not pay out US$54 million that users had "wagered on Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's ouster after he was killed."

The cardinal described the "gamifying" of war as "a profound moral failure" that "strips away the humanity of real people."

He said, "Let's not forget, a 'hit' isn't putting points on the board; it's a grieving family whose suffering we ignore when we prioritise entertainment, and profit, over empathy."

Cardinal Cupich said, "Our government is treating the suffering of the Iranian people as a backdrop for our own entertainment, as if it's just another piece of content to be swiped through while we're waiting in line at the grocery store."

'In the end, we lose our humanity when we are thrilled by the destructive power of our military. We become addicted to the 'spectacle' of explosions. And the price of this habit is almost unnoticeable, as we become desensitised to the true costs of war'

He warned, "In the end, we lose our humanity when we are thrilled by the destructive power of our military. We become addicted to the 'spectacle' of explosions. And the price of this habit is almost unnoticeable, as we become desensitised to the true costs of war."

But, said Cardinal Cupich, "the longer we remain blind to the terrible consequences of war, the more we are risking the most precious gift God gave us: our humanity."

He stressed, "I know that the American people are better than this. We have the good sense to know that what is happening is not entertainment but war, and that Iran is a nation of people, not a video game others play to entertain us."

Charity concert raises funds for Precious Blood Hospital

HONG KONG (SE): The charity concert, "Rhythm of Love—Precious Blood Hospital [Caritas] Charity Concert", took place on March 6 at Queen Elizabeth Stadium. Organised by Caritas-Hong Kong and sponsored by the Rotary Club of Hong Kong Northwest, the event's proceeds will support Precious Blood Hospital [Caritas] and contribute to its ongoing development, enabling it to continue providing affordable medical services to the wider public.

In his opening address, Dr. Joseph Lui Cho-ze, medical superintendent of the Precious Blood Hospital, thanked the Rotary Club, donors and all contributors for making the concert a success. He explained that, after expenses, donations would be used to replace or acquire advanced medical equipment, thereby enhancing treatment outcomes. He emphasised that the event also raised awareness of community support for affordable healthcare and boosted the morale of the hospital's medical staff.

Vincent Lee Po-hong, president of the Rotary Club of Hong Kong Northwest, later received a souvenir from Dr. Lui—a dried-flower artwork crafted by users of Caritas rehabilitation services. The piece symbolically features musical notes formed from dried flowers, representing love and hope transformed into melody.

Right: Albert Au thanks the audience. Photo: supplied

Below right: A joyful moment as over 2,500 attendees waved their light-sticks when their pictures were being taken by a photographer on stage.





Lee said that every contribution would go directly to the Precious Blood Hospital, highlighting its longstanding service to the Sham Shui Po community and the importance of ongoing community support.

Prior to the concert, Lui noted that the fundraising effort was not solely about raising money. Rather, its primary aim was to affirm community support for the hospital's mission and to reinforce the confidence of its staff.

"In a market with long waiting times at public hospitals, offering a reliable and affordable private healthcare option is our core value," he said. "This approach will help ease the burden on the public healthcare system, benefiting both patients and society as a whole."

He added that many of the hospital's medical devices—such as CT scanners and MRI machines—require upgrading due to the facility's lengthy operational history. The hospital also plans to acquire new equipment, including ultrasound machines and surgical instruments, to better serve patients.

Lui said the hospital would announce the final fundraising results at a later date. While the amount raised is significant, he noted that the high cost of advanced medical equipment means the campaign has not yet reached its target, emphasising the need for continued donations.

Among those attending the concert were Father Joseph Yim Tak-lung, chief executive of Caritas Hong Kong; Father Dominique Mukonda and Father Peter Lo Pak-wing, deputy chief executives; vicars general, Father Peter Choy Wai-man, Father Paul Kam Po-wai and Father Joseph Chan Wing-chiu; religious sisters; and representatives of supporting organisations.

Father Mukonda said the impact of the concert extended beyond financial contributions. "Its true value is in assisting the brothers and sisters in need whom the hospital serves," he said. He also highlighted the importance of glorifying God through concrete actions, noting that supporting charitable efforts is a quiet yet profound way of proclaiming the Gospel and expressing the spirit of almsgiving during Lent.

The Precious Blood Hospital was founded by the Sisters of the Precious Blood and officially began providing medical services in July 1937. For nearly a century, it has served the Sham Shui Po district, offering a wide range of care to those in need. In 2017, part of the hospital complex was designated a Grade III historic building by the Hong Kong government, recognising its significant historical role in the community's development.

In 1993, the Sisters of the Precious Blood transferred management of the hospital to Caritas Hong Kong, after which it was renamed Precious Blood Hospital [Caritas]. As demand for medical care has increased, Caritas Hong Kong has invested significant resources to enhance the hospital's offerings. The hospital has also strengthened collaboration with the government and medical institutions through various public-private partnership programmes, enabling it to serve more patients in need.

As a non-profit private hospital, it has also established a medical charity fund to support economically disadvantaged patients, enabling them to access timely treatment and surgery.

The concert featured performances by renowned singer Albert Au, alongside Stacey Long, Ramon Lo, and other winners from TVB's Midlife, Sing & Shine!. The 2,500 attendees waved colourful light sticks in support of the performers and the healthcare services provided by Caritas.

A message from the Catholic Church Lenten Campaign - 4th week

"There is still the youngest" [1 Samuel 16:11]

We are often drawn to admire what is grand, beautiful, and seemingly perfect. Yet, how often do we pause to notice the smallest or weakest in society, those whom the world often overlooks, but are cherished deeply by God?

Today, and especially within the Church, young people embody hope for the future, and their involvement is vital. Their contributions deserve recognition, and their voices should be encouraged in every decision. Yet vulnerability is not limited to the young. Many elderly among us may feel isolated by illness or loneliness, but their wisdom and experience are treasures that connect generations. By honouring our elders and listening to their stories, the younger generation gains a deeper sense of identity and faith.

In his encyclical, *Dilexi Te,* [I Have Loved You], Pope Leo XIV emphasised that the poor and marginalised are not objects of pity, but beloved members of our family in Christ.

People often judge by appearances, but the Lord looks into the heart [1 Samuel 16:7]. Those overlooked by society may hold infinite possibilities in God's eyes. Christ calls us to recognise and value those who are forgotten or undervalued. When we actively reach out to support these groups, we fulfill Christ's commandment to love our neighbour and invite his blessings into our lives through acts of compassion and acceptance.

Each day, we are called to care for the "smallest in society", following Jesus' example of compassion. We might join parish service groups, visit those in need, or participate in community outreach.

Especially during Lent, a sacred time of repentance and renewal, we are invited to deepen our faith, extend mercy, and become messengers of hope and light to those who suffer. In doing so, we answer Christ's call to serve: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" [Matthew 25:40].

Lenten Campaign Organising Committee, 2026

ENGLISH LESSONS
Refer local friends to
Paul Stables, Oxford grad,
Zoom Video or face to face
near North Point MTR,
P5/6, F1-13, DSE, IELTS
Tel/WhatsApp: 6012 3236
tutorialfield.com.hk

HELP!
THE BIRTHRIGHT SOCIETY
A pregnancy counselling and care service designed to help any expectant mother with a
PREGNANCY PROBLEM
For free confidential help call:
2337 5551 or 2522 1071 (7:30p.m.– 9:30p.m.)

Lenten Way of the Cross highlights care for creation

HONG KONG (SE): The Diocesan Commission for Integral Human Development organised an outdoor Way of the Cross at Our Lady of Joy Abbey on February 21, transforming the traditional indoor devotion into an ecological reflection.

Participants were guided to reflect on the journey from Jesus's suffering and death to his resurrection within a natural setting, using prayers linking the Way of the Cross to ecology, written by Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha Chi-shing. As they walked towards the



abbey, they shared reflections and explored the causes of the Earth's suffering, considering how Christians can bear witness to Christ through environmental protection.

The booklet of ecological prayers for Lent was first written in 2000 and revised in 2023. In its preface, Bishop Ha reflected on developments over the past two decades, noting that while the global ecological environment has deteriorated, awareness and efforts to protect it have also increased.

"This situation can be likened to a race between two runners, with the outcome being a critical matter for all humanity and the whole of creation," he said. He also asked what personal contribution each person can make in this race, expressing the hope that the prayers would inspire readers to follow the example of Francis of Assisi by recognising God in all creatures and embracing all beings within God.

According to Debby Chan, a project officer from the commission, efforts are underway to translate the ecological prayers into English to broaden their reach.

Participants were also invited to help clean the natural environment around the abbey, clearing fallen leaves and branches as part of a "renewal" process that turns them into compost to nourish the soil.

Chan explained that this initiative—turning dead leaves into nutrients for new life—echoes the central message of Lent regarding Jesus's passion, death, and resurrection. She also noted that being surrounded by nature can help participants encounter and connect more deeply with God.

The procession concluded with Mass celebrated by Bishop Ha, who emphasised the importance of Lent as a time for spiritual growth and reflection on awareness of God's presence in daily life, as well as an opportunity to repent for indifference and neglect of his voice.

The event was a collaborative effort by the environmental concern group of St. Thomas the Apostle Church, St. John the Baptist Parish, Holy Cross Church, and the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, attracting over 100 participants.

To extend the spirit of the event throughout Lent, the commission has also prepared a meditation guide titled *2026 Lent: A 40-day Journey of Encounter.* The guide includes daily ecological action suggestions, such as purchasing locally grown fruit and vegetables or using environmentally friendly products. Printed calendars are being distributed through parishes, while digital versions are available on the commission's website.

Chancery Notice

I. DIOCESAN BOARD OF CATHOLIC CEMETERIES

(a) *Ex Officio Member*:
Rev. David CHAN

(b) *Appointed Members*:
Cardinal Stephen CHOW, S.J., has appointed/reappointed the following to be members for a two-year term, effective 24 March 2026:

Mr. Dominic CHAN Kam-tong, *Chairperson*
Rev. Dominic CHAN
Rev. Deacon Patrick LEUNG
Ms. Anna May CHAN
Ms. Annie CHOI
Mr. Francis CHOY Chi-keung
Mr. Jerome LEE
Mr. Daniel SO Wai-yin
Mr. William TANG Chung-ming
Ms. Garley WONG

II. HOLY THURSDAY – 2 April
Cardinal Stephen CHOW, S.J., will preside at the concelebrated "Chrism Mass" in the Cathedral at 11:00 a.m. The "Chrism Mass" signifies the close unity of all priests and deacons with their bishop in sharing and exercising respectively with him the one priesthood of Christ. It also signifies the close communion between the bishop and his flock. On this occasion the priests and deacons present will publicly renew their commitment to their ministries. All diocesan and religious priests, as well as deacons and lay people, are cordially invited to participate.

III. GOOD FRIDAY – 3 April
(a) *Fast and Abstinence*
All faithful who have completed their 14th year are to abstain from meat. Those who have completed their 18th year but have not yet begun their 60th year are also obliged to fast.

(b) *Holy Land Special Collection*
It is the wish of the Holy Father that each year on Good Friday, in all churches, Mass centres and chapels with eucharistic services for the faithful, special prayers be offered and a special collection be taken up in support of our brethren in the Holy Land and the numerous pastoral, charitable, educational and social institutions and projects sponsored by the Church there. In view of the enormous expenses, the Holy See is appealing for a more generous support from us.

The collection may take place either during the celebration of the Lord's Passion or during the pious exercise of the Way of the Cross.

The collection should be sent to the Diocesan Procuration with a cheque issued for this specific purpose and made payable to "*The Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong*".

IV. HOLY SATURDAY – 4 April
In accordance with the approved practice of our Diocese, priests who preside at the Easter Vigil liturgy and those who concelebrate may, for pastoral reasons, administer confirmation to adults and children who received baptism some time ago, provided they have been properly instructed.

Given at the Chancery Office,
9 March 2026.

Rev. Lawrence LEE
Chancellor

Reflections from the vicar general



By Father Paul Kam Po-wai

Light up lives

Since its launch in 2023, the Light Up Fund—established by the diocese and implemented by Caritas—has accompanied young people on their journeys for two years. This period marks a crucial stage in our mission to rekindle hope in the lives of incarcerated and released young people.

The diocese has always been deeply committed to prisoners' well-being—not only by providing spiritual guidance and emotional support through specialised prison services, but also by supporting their reintegration into society and helping them rebuild their lives. In recent years, the demand for further education among incarcerated individuals has steadily increased. In response, the diocese established the Light Up Fund to provide ongoing education, career training, psychological support, family restoration, and job-matching services for those aged 35 and under.

Over the past two years, we have witnessed numerous young people equipping themselves through educational courses, finding confidence and direction in vocational training, mending relationships through family counselling, and experiencing the warmth of acceptance in support groups. These transformations reflect not only the acquisition of knowledge and skills, but also a reshaping of life's values—regaining dignity after loss, rebuilding connections after estrangement, and igniting hope from darkness.

During the Lunar New Year, we organised a celebratory gathering attended by over 60 friends, including Cardinal Stephen Chow, Light Up Fund team members, colleagues, young people, benefactors, and partners. The atmosphere was vibrant and warm. This rare opportunity allowed us to share experiences, connect with one another, and exchange blessings.

One of the most touching moments was the group sharing session, with three young people who had participated in the fund's programmes in each group. We listened to their feelings, journeys, transformations, reflections, and insights first-hand, and we were all deeply moved. Additionally, several compassionate employers expressed their gratitude for the young people who joined their teams, highlighting their appreciation of the youths' diligence and commitment, which brought energy and vitality to their workplaces.

We are grateful to God for the blessings, guidance, and care extended to the Light Up Fund team and the young beneficiaries. We have witnessed these young people grow and contribute to society, transforming from beneficiaries into companions on our journey. Through their work and community contributions, they have become servants of God.

We sincerely thank all donors, partners, and every young person for their contributions. The trust and support of everyone have made it possible to "light up" people's lives. In the future, we will continue to enhance our services, connect more resources, and ensure every young person has a second chance—reintegrating into society with love and support, and contributing their talents.

May every young person who has ever felt lost find their light in God's mercy and become a beacon for others. Let us walk together and continue this mission of being the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Vatican releases synod report on women's role in Church leadership

ROME (OSV NEWS): The Vatican has published the final report of the synod study group examining women's participation in the Church, which calls for expanded roles for women in governance and leadership in roles not including ordained ministry.

The 75-page document, released on March 10 in English and Italian, discusses women's leadership but does not address the possible female diaconate.

As the third of 15 anticipated synod study group reports, it is considered a "working document" that will help form proposals for the Pope Leo XIV to review.



Sister Nathalie Becquart, undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops, speaks to Iacopo Scaramuzzi, a reporter for* La Repubblica, *in April 2023. Photo: CNS/Cindy Wooden

A 'charismatic path' for women

The study group calls for "new spaces" for women to lead in evangelisation and administration alongside ordained ministers.

"Alongside the sacramental path and distinct from it, there is also a charismatic path that can be fruitfully pursued to open new spaces of participation for the lay faithful, particularly for women," it states. "It follows that even in the exercise of governance within a diocese, opportunities of this kind may arise and should be employed."

The report argues that laywomen have unique charisms from the Holy Spirit that demand recognition.

"Today laywomen have the right to affirm their participation in the mission of the Church not only on the basis of their equal human and Christian dignity but also on the basis of the charisms given by God," it says.

"A new evangelisation has become urgent," it adds, "One that depends less exclusively on priestly resources and is enriched by the presence and contributions of women."

'New forms of exercising authority'

The synod study group calls for theology and canon law to "explore new forms of exercising authority grounded in the Sacrament of Baptism and distinct from those deriving from Holy Orders, so that adequate canonical forms may be found to make effective the participation of women in roles of leadership within the Church."

The report says, "There is no reason or impediment that should prevent women from carrying out leadership roles in the Church." It also recommends a "reformulation of the areas of competence of the ordained ministry," suggesting that redefining those boundaries "could open the way to recognise new spaces of responsibility for women in the Church."

Female diaconate not addressed

Notably, the report does not address the specific question of a possible female diaconate, a controversial topic of debate within the Synod on Synodality. During the second session of the synod, Pope Francis reactivated a commission studying women's access to the diaconate under Giuseppe Cardinal Petrocchi.

In December 2025, that commission stopped short of endorsing female deacons but supported broadening women's access to instituted ministries such as catechist.

The Virgin Mary as a model

Drawing on Scripture and Church tradition, the report cites both the Virgin Mary and St. Mary Magdalene as paradigms for female authority in the Church.

"Mary is the supreme model of the charismatic dimension. Though she does not belong to the hierarchical structure, she possesses within the Church a unique authority and spiritual fruitfulness," it states.

The document also highlights that Christ entrusted Mary Magdalene to announce the Resurrection: "The Apostles themselves received this proclamation from her."

Pope Leo's appointments of women to Roman Curia

The report details appointments by Pope Francis and Pope Leo as evidence that women already serve in high Church leadership roles.

It cites *Praedicate Evangelium*, which allows the possibility for a laywomen to lead a Vatican dicastery "depending on the power of governance and the specific competence and function of the Dicastery or Office in question."

However, the report notes women in the Roman Curia say "certain attitudes marked by clericalism persist," and that "women, even in positions of responsibility, sometimes struggle to be involved and listened to on equal footing with male colleagues, particularly in interactions with ordained ministers."

The study group highlights Pope Leo XIV's appointments of Trappistine Mother Martha Elizabeth Driscoll and Sister Iuliana Sarosi, a member of the Congregation of the Mother of God, as consultors to the Dicastery for the Clergy, and Cristiana Perrella as president of the Pontifical Insigne Academy of Fine Arts and Letters.

It also cites Pope Leo's July 2025 remarks: "the role of women in the Church has to continue to develop" and his aim to continue "in the footsteps of Francis, including in appointing women to some leadership roles at different levels in the Church's life."

Women in the Bible and Church history

The synod report is structured in three parts: the group's history, a "synthesis of the themes" from the synodal process, and an appendix.

The appendix covers: women in Scripture, significant women in Church history, contemporary female Church leaders, Marian and Petrine principles, ecclesial authority, and contributions of Pope Francis and Pope Leo XIV.

Among the examples of women highlighted by the document are St. Catherine of Siena, St. Joan of Arc, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Maria Montessori, and Servant of God Dorothy Day.

EDITORIAL

SUNDAY EXAMINER

15 MARCH 2026

From crisis to compassion: A plea for disarmament

AT THE END of February, the United States and Israel launched a major military operation against Iran, carrying out airstrikes on multiple sites, including the presidential office, nuclear facilities, military airports, and other buildings. Iran's supreme leader, Ali Hosseini Khamenei, his relatives, and several high-ranking Iranian officials were reportedly killed in the attacks.

Iran retaliated against several US and Israeli bases in the Middle East, with Dubai in the United Arab Emirates also affected. Airport facilities were damaged, leading to its closure.

This sudden news was both shocking and worrying, as Dubai Airport is among the busiest in the world, leaving many travellers, including people from Hong Kong, stranded. Fortunately, at the time of going to press, Dubai Airport has reopened and stranded Hong Kong residents are returning home safely.

A short term resolution seems impossible. When one side launches an attack, the other retaliates in revenge, with both parties convinced of the righteousness of their own actions and eager to justify them. Missiles and drones fill the skies above the Middle East and the Gulf; government infrastructure has been bombed, and people's livelihoods have been gravely affected, not to mention the devastating casualties inflicted by war.

In the first three days, over a thousand people died in Iran, more than 5,000 were injured, and around 200 children were killed; US soldiers also died, while Israel reported only dozens of deaths. The flames of war spread to neighbouring countries: Lebanon, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain reported civilian casualties, and Azerbaijan was also affected, though Iran refused to accept responsibility.

As ordinary Christians what can we do to create peace and allow countries or regions in war to enjoy peace?

Pope Leo XIV has issued successive appeals regarding the situation in the Middle East, the Russia-Ukraine war, and the civil war in Sudan, pointing out that violence is not the best way, and true peace be achieved can only be achieved through calm, rational, and responsible dialogue.

The pope also called on countries to engage in diplomatic coordination to quell the flames of war. On March 1, he received a group of young people and emphasised that "we must pray more for peace, stand united, and reject the temptation to hurt others... we must always choose good."

Some of Pope Leo's important speeches have been compiled into a book titled, *May Peace Be With You*, for which he wrote the preface for the English edition: "Prayer is the power of the unarmed." He continued, saying that in prayer, we disarm our egos and treat others with sincerity. In fact, "only a peaceful heart can build a peaceful world."

The pope's prayer intention for March is: "Please pray for disarmament and peace," words that resonate deeply amidst the current severe international situation. Let us pray that God enlightens the leaders of all nations to halt the arms race, prioritise the lives of people above all else, and remove the nuclear threat so that humanity may look towards a happier and more secure future. SE

SUNDAY EXAMINER

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Address all correspondence to the editor of the Sunday Examiner.

Pope urges peace, warns about wider Middle East conflict

(OSV NEWS): Pope Leo XIV called for an end to the war in Iran and warned that the conflict could drag more countries in the Middle East into instability.

Speaking to pilgrims after praying the Angelus prayer on March 8, Pope Leo said that developing news from Iran and from across the Middle East has caused "deep dismay."

He said, "Amid episodes of violence and devastation, and the widespread climate of hatred and fear, there is also the concern that the conflict may widen and that other countries in the region, including Lebanon, may once again sink into instability."

According to *The Associated Press,* Israeli forces struck an oil storage facility in Tehran, as well as targeted assaults in southern Lebanon against commanders of the Lebanese branch of Iran's Revolutionary Guards.

Iran has continued striking US allies in the Gulf, including Bahrain, where it fired missiles at a desalination plant. Iranian foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, defended the attack, arguing that the "US set this precedent" after it struck a desalination plant in Iran, *AP* reported.



Smoke rises following an explosion in Tehran, Iran, on March 7.
Photo: OSV News/Naser Safarzadeh, West Asia News Agency via Reuters

The pope's concern for Lebanon came as government officials confirmed that the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah militants resulted in the deaths of 394 people, including 83 children.

In his appeal, Pope Leo called on Catholics to pray so that "the roar of bombs may cease, that the weapons may fall silent, and that a space for dialogue may open in which the voice of the peoples can be heard."

The pope said, "I entrust this supplication to Mary, Queen of Peace. May she intercede for those who suffer because of war and guide hearts along the paths of reconciliation and hope."

Less than a day after the start of the war, the pope called for diplomacy to "regain its proper role" and that "the well-being of peoples, who yearn for peaceful existence founded on justice, be upheld."

At his Angelus address on March 1, several hours after the US and Israel revealed that Iran's supreme leader, 86-year-old Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was killed, the pope expressed his concern, highlighting that "stability and peace are not achieved through mutual threats, nor through the use of weapons, which sow destruction, suffering, and death, but only through reasonable, sincere, and responsible dialogue."

The pope warned, "Faced with the possibility of a tragedy of immense proportions, I make a heartfelt appeal to all the parties involved to assume the moral responsibility of halting the spiral of violence before it becomes an irreparable abyss."

Birthright Society holds annual general meeting



Dr. Au Yeung presented a Certificate of Appreciation to a volunteer. Photo: supplied

HONG KONG (SE): The Birthright Society held its annual general meeting on 26 January 2026 at Caritas Restaurant, Caine Road.

Chairperson, Dr. Peter Au Yeung, reported that with support from Caritas Family Services, the Society assisted 34 mothers facing significant challenges over the past year.

Birthright Society also collaborated with Caritas Hong Kong Youth Community Service on Project Hyacinth, which offers intensive psychosocial postpartum follow-up for young mothers who have experienced multiple abortions, helping them reintegrate into daily life and fostering a supportive network among these women and their families.

In 2025, the Society welcomed 185 new members and organised 807 service programmes for them.

Au Yeung expressed gratitude to members, supporters and donors for their ongoing commitment. He emphasised that the Society would intensify its efforts to promote its pro-life mission in the coming year. Details of the Birthright Society are contained in website *http://birthright.catholic.org.hk*

Lebanon's Eastern Catholic patriarchs, bishops call for end to 'spiral of violence'

(OSV NEWS): The Assembly of Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops in Lebanon called "for an immediate halt to the spiral of violence" currently taking place in the Middle East in a March 5 statement. They urged "a return to constructive dialogue and responsible diplomatic action, grounded in the pursuit of the common good of peoples who long for a peaceful life founded on justice and dignity."

The Church leaders expressed "deep concern" over the "escalation of armed conflicts in Lebanon and the Middle East" and over the "grave consequences" that would arise for the region's people if the escalation continues.

The statement was issued following Israeli strikes in Beirut's southern suburbs targeting the Iranian-backed, Shiite militant organisation Hezbollah—part of the larger conflict in the Middle East that began on February 28 with joint US-Israeli strikes on Iran. The assembly is made up of leaders of the Eastern Catholic Churches for the promotion of peace, dialogue and stability in Lebanon and the Middle East.

The statement was signed by Armenian Catholic Patriarch Raphaël Bedros XXI Minassian, president of Armenian Caritas; Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch Youssef Absi of Antioch and all the East; Syrian Catholic Patriarch Ignace Youssef III Younan of Antioch; and Béchara Cardinal Boutros Raï, Maronite Catholic patriarch of Antioch and all the East.



Smoke rises after Israeli strikes in Lebanon on March 5.
Photo: OSV News/Karamallah Daher, Reuters

Citing Pope Leo XIV's recent plea to choose good over violence, the leaders said, "This clear moral call reminds us that peace is not a secondary or temporary option, but a human duty and a collective responsibility."

They said, "The continuation of this spiral of violence threatens the dignity of the human person, which is a gift from God, and undermines the foundations of justice and stability."

The statement called on government leaders in Lebanon to "work toward shielding our country from regional conflicts, safeguarding its internal unity, and strengthening civil peace," while imploring the international community to "exert every possible effort to prevent further escalation and to establish just solutions that safeguard the rights of peoples and protect human dignity, for justice is the sure path to a firm and lasting peace."

It also underscored the importance of welcoming those who may become displaced and to "receive them with the spirit of the gospel."

Speaking to "our faithful sons and daughters and all people of goodwill," the bishops asked for them to help those in need and to "persevere in fervent prayer for peace."

They meanwhile entrusted affected areas and the world to Divine Providence, "asking God to grant our troubled world a just and lasting peace, to guide hearts toward reconciliation, and to strengthen the steps of our Lebanese people on the paths of fraternity and harmony with a sincere national spirit, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Queen of Peace."



The Catholic church in Dengasargi village, in the Rayagada district of Odisha, India, was vandalised on March 3.
Photo: RVA News

Catholic Church vandalised in eastern India

ODISHA (RVANEWS): A Catholic church in Dengasargi village, Rayagada district, eastern India's Odisha state, was vandalised and sacred items desecrated by a group of villagers on March 3, according to reports from Church authorities and *Catholic Connect*.

At around 7:00pm, a group of tribal villagers gathered and demanded that three Catholic families come out of their homes.

"The families were frightened and remained inside, fearing they would be assaulted," Father Abed Kumar Khura, parish priest of the cathedral parish in Rayagada, recounted.

When the families refused, the crowd allegedly targeted a small Catholic church on the village street.

"At around 9:00pm, the mob broke open the church door and entered the building. They damaged the altar and the cross and collected sacred items, including the priest's vestments, Bibles, and other religious articles. These were taken outside and set on fire," Father Khura said.

Following the incident, Church authorities approached the police. Acting on the advice of Bishop Aplinar Senapati of Rayagada, the affected families filed a First Information Report on March 4 at JK Pur Police Station.

Later that day, a police team visited the village with church representatives to assess the situation. The delegation included Father Shanti Chandana Pani, vicar general of the diocese; Father Khura; Father Eric Xalco; advocate John Paul; and Sujit Nayak.

"When we reached the village, most of the accused were not present," Father Khura said, adding that police also began examining the legal status of the land where the church stands.

Later in the evening, a senior officer representing the district superintendent of police arrived to supervise the inquiry. Both parties were asked to appear at Therubali Police Station for questioning.

Police deployed additional personnel to maintain order and warned that anyone refusing to cooperate could be brought in under escort.

According to *Catholic Connect*, around 180 villagers later appeared at the police station, accompanied by members of the affected families.

During the inquiry, some villagers claimed tensions had existed since the church was constructed in 2023. Others raised concerns about the ownership of the land where it stands.

Police reminded those present that disputes must be resolved through legal means and warned against taking the law into their own hands.

Local authorities facilitated a temporary peace agreement between the communities. Officials assured protection for the affected Catholic families and confirmed that Christians would be allowed to continue prayer and worship.

Police remain stationed in the village to ensure security while investigations continue.

Father Khura expressed appreciation for the authorities' intervention.

"We are grateful to the police administration for their timely response and cooperation," he said, noting that the prompt action helped prevent further escalation.

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Cardinal highlights role of women in peacebuilding and dialogue

ROME (RVA NEWS): George Cardinal Jacob Koovakad, prefect of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, highlighted the crucial role of women in promoting peace and dialogue in a world marked by conflict and division.

Speaking at a conference in Rome on March 6, He emphasized that women's leadership and dialogue are essential for building bridges between cultures and societies, according to Vatican News.

The conference, titled "Women, Leadership, and Dialogue: Bridges Between Knowledge, Cultures, and Society," was held in the Chapter Room of the Cloister of the Convent of Santa Maria in Rome. It brought together diplomats, political leaders, academics, and representatives of civil society to reflect on the role of women in fostering peace, cooperation, and social transformation.

The cardinal, from the Syro-Malabar Church in India, stressed that the path to peace requires more than technological progress or military strength.

"While modern warfare increasingly relies on technology and advanced weapons, peace demands a deeper disarmament of the heart, mind, and life," Vatican News reported him as saying.

According to the cardinal, such a transformation calls for leadership shaped by education,



Cardinal Koovakad.
Photo: RVA News

cultural dialogue, and the active participation of society.

Cardinal Koovakad also underscored the historic and ongoing contributions of women in peacebuilding. He cited figures such as St. Catherine of Siena, who mediated among powerful leaders in her time, and Eleanor Roosevelt, who played a major role in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

He also recalled the words of Kenyan Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Wangari Maathai, who once said humanity must rise to "a new level of consciousness" and give hope to one another.

"That time is now," the cardinal said, pointing to the many women currently engaged in peace initiatives across the world.

Among them, he noted, are Israeli and Palestinian women participating in movements such as Women Wage Peace and Women of the Sun, which seek dialogue and diplomatic solutions to the long-standing conflict in the region.

Cardinal Koovakad observed that women often bring distinctive qualities to leadership, particularly in times of crisis. These include empathy for the suffering of others, resilience in the face of adversity, and the courage to rebuild broken relationships.

Women leaders, he said, frequently show an ability to overcome prejudice, involve both allies and adversaries in dialogue, and promote justice, care for the environment, and the common good.

Reflecting on today's global challenges, the cardinal noted that humanity must rediscover its identity as one human family sharing a common planet.

Promoting women's leadership, he said, is therefore not only a matter of justice but also "a guarantee for the future," Vatican News reported.

He concluded by stressing that building a peaceful world requires the commitment of everyone.

"Building a future of peace, fraternity, and solidarity requires the commitment and synergy of all hands and all hearts," he said. "Only together can we overcome prejudice, sow seeds of hope, and contribute to a more humane and fraternal world."

Priest killed by Israeli tank fire in Lebanon

BEIRUT (LICAS NEWS): Maronite Father Pierre al-Rai, the parish priest of the Christian border town of Qlayaa, Lebanon, died from injuries sustained when an Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) tank opened fire on a house on March 9, according to Lebanon's *National News Agency* and a medical source cited by *Agence France-Presse*.

Reports state that the house was "hit twice in succession by artillery shelling from a hostile Merkava tank". The first strike wounded the homeowner and his wife. Neighbours—including Father al-Rai—and Red Cross paramedics rushed to assist the injured. Shortly afterwards, a second shell struck the house, wounding the priest and three others. Father al-Rai later died of his injuries.

It was not immediately clear why Israeli forces targeted the house, which was located on the outskirts of the town.

Qlayaa is a Christian village of approximately 8,000 residents in the Marjeyoun district near the Israeli border. Until now, it had not been drawn into the fighting between Israel and Hezbollah.

The mayor, Hanna Daher, urged Lebanese authorities to prevent armed activity in the area. He called on the Lebanese army and state to "prevent any armed manifestations inside the town or in its vicinity, and to pursue anyone who carries weapons outside the framework of legitimate institutions."

The people of Qlayaa, he said, "refuse to allow their town to be turned into an arena for any armed activity that might endanger civilians."

On March 6, Father al-Rai joined residents at a gathering in the nearby town of Marjayoun, where locals stated that they would remain in their homes despite evacuation warnings issued by the Israeli army to residents living south of the Litani River, approximately 30 kilometres from the border.

"When we defend our land, we defend it peacefully, and we carry only the weapons of peace, goodness, love and prayer," Father al-Rai said, adding, "We are compelled to remain in danger because these are our homes and we will not leave them."

Residents of Christian towns along or near the border have attempted to remain uninvolved in the confrontation between Hezbollah and Israel.

The pontifical foundation Aid to the Church in Need said that Father al-Rai served in the Maronite Diocese of Tyre and worked with the organisation in supporting pastoral activities in Qlayaa parish, which serves about 3,000 parishioners.

"Pope Leo XIV expresses his deep sorrow for all the victims of the recent bombings in the Middle East, for the many innocent people, including many children," Vatican spokesperson, Matteo Bruni said.

The pope also mentioned "those who were helping them," naming Father al-Rai. Bruni said the pope "is following events with concern and prays for an end to hostilities as soon as possible."



Some 245 youth ministry leaders and representatives from around the world joined the meeting, underscoring strong global interest in WYD Seoul 2027.
Photo: Committee for Communications of the Archdiocese of Seoul

World Youth Day 2027 enters implementation phase

SEOUL (SE): SE: The Committee for Communications of the Archdiocese of Seoul, South Korea, announced that preparations for World Youth Day [WYD] Seoul 2027 have entered a new stage, following a joint online 'Kick-off Meeting for the Implementation Phase' hosted by the WYD Seoul 2027 Local Organising Committee [LOC] and the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life [DLFL] on March 5.

According to the Committee, the meeting, held at the Dicastery's conference room and streamed online, brought together approximately 250 youth ministry representatives from bishops' conferences, ecclesial movements, and communities globally, as well as 25 members of the WYD Seoul 2027 LOC.

Key participants included Archbishop Peter Soon-taick Chung, President of the LOC; Bishop Paul Kyung-sang Lee, General Coordinator; and Father Franco Galdino of the DLFL Youth Office. Despite time zone differences, the event saw robust international engagement, reflecting growing global interest in WYD Seoul 2027.

Archbishop Peter Soon-taick Chung, in his opening address, outlined four key words encapsulating the vision for Seoul 2027: encounter, pastoral care, pilgrimage, and mission.

He emphasised that WYD Seoul 2027 aims to provide young people with an experience of community, spiritual renewal, and an opportunity to encounter both God and each other. He described Seoul as a city where tradition meets the future, hospitality flourishes, and the longing for peace is deeply felt.

Bishop Kyung-sang Lee welcomed attendees, expressing gratitude to those committed to youth ministry worldwide and encouraging ongoing support for WYD 2027.

Father Franco Galdino explained that the meeting was designed to inform bishops' conferences and youth ministry leaders about the progress of WYD Seoul 2027 and to enhance communication with the organising committee. He underscored that World Youth Day is a shared journey in which the Church accompanies young people towards an encounter with Christ.

The programme featured presentations on the Church in Korea, the pilgrimage of the WYD symbols, and the pastoral and spiritual significance of WYD Seoul 2027. Organisers highlighted key themes of the event, such as Korean culture, language, and Seoul's identity as a technologically advanced city. Information regarding the official website, social media, and LOC international contacts was also provided.

The LOC unveiled nine types of pilgrim participation packages, differentiated by meal and accommodation options. The committee reported that contributions for these packages will rise by 10 percent compared to previous WYD editions, citing global inflation and local costs, while aiming to minimise the burden on pilgrims. Further details will be available soon on the official WYD Seoul 2027 website.

The committee also introduced the Second International Preparatory Meeting for WYD Seoul 2027, set for 14–17 September in Korea. This was followed by a question-and-answer session, with participants from countries including Australia, the Czech Republic, Vietnam, the United States, Timor-Leste, Cabo Verde, Nigeria, Ukraine, Myanmar, and the Shalom Community, who discussed local preparations and raised queries about visas, diocesan involvement, registration timelines, and upcoming meetings.

Participants remained highly engaged, responding positively to presentations and especially to a video introducing the Korean Church and WYD Seoul 2027.

The Committee for Communications of the Archdiocese of Seoul noted that strong international participation confirmed broad global interest in WYD Seoul 2027.

The organising committee reaffirmed its commitment to ongoing communication and cooperation with bishops' conferences, religious congregations, and ecclesial communities around the world as preparations advance.

Philippine Catholic groups oppose diluted anti-dynasty bill



Former first lady, Imelda Marcos with her son and current Philippine president, Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., in 2022. Photo: CNS/Eloisa Lopez, Reuters

MANILA (UCAN): Catholic groups have opposed a diluted version of a new anti-dynasty bill approved by a 32-member committee of the Philippine House of Representatives, saying it is "designed to leave dynastic power mostly untouched."

Karlo Abadines, executive director of the Jesuit-run Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan [Church at the Nation's Service], said on 3 March that "the concentration of power with a few families" undermines the principle that "the common good is the good of all, not just a few."

The organisation was joined by the anti-corruption group, Clergy for Good Governance and the Socio-Political Affairs Ministry of the Archdiocese of Manila.

The Catholic groups, along with 10 others, released a statement on March 3 emphasising that the approved version of the anti-dynasty bill is "designed to leave dynastic power mostly untouched."

The bill is supported by allies of the president, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who himself hails from one of the country's most enduring political families.

It will now move to the plenary, where all 318 members of the House—most of whom are members of political dynasties—will scrutinise the bill.

Reform advocates have long awaited the anti-dynasty bill, blaming political dynasties for much of the corruption and inequality in one of Asia's oldest democracies.

Nearly 80 per cent of members of Congress are part of political dynasties, according to a 2022 study by the Ateneo School of Government.

The new bill has been widely criticised as a watered-down version of earlier proposals—nearly identical to a version promoted by Faustino Dy III, the speaker of the House who also belongs to a political dynasty, and Ferdinand Alexander Marcos, the House majority leader and the president's son.

The House version prohibits political dynasties only up to the second degree of consanguinity or affinity, while reform advocates want a prohibition up to the fourth degree.

It also allows members of the same family to hold government positions simultaneously, provided they run in different areas or at different levels of government.

In their statement, anti-dynasty advocates said that Congress "is poised to pass an 'anti-dynasty' label without an anti-dynasty effect."

They called on Congress to ensure the prohibition "must cover relatives within the fourth civil degree of consanguinity or affinity," and also ban them from simultaneously holding public office.

"We call on the public, civil society, faith communities, youth, and all democracy advocates to speak out and demand a real anti-dynasty law," the advocates said. "The country cannot afford fake reform that legitimises dynasty rule."

Abadines stressed that the concentration of power in a few families "leads to corruption and loss of accountability, which is, at the end of the day, against the idea of the common good."

The Catholic Church in the Philippines remains one of the most vocal opponents of political dynasties in the country, although its leaders have also been criticised for accepting donations, sponsorships, and even luxuries from politicians.

Most recently, Pablo Virgilio Cardinal David criticised political dynasties in a speech on the 40th anniversary of the People Power Revolution.

Cardinal David, the bishop of Kalookan, said the country's democracy is not yet strong, "when politics still revolves around patronage and dole-outs."

When love becomes a way of life

John Singarayar, SVD

There is an old African proverb that says, 'If you want to go fast, go alone.' But if you want to go far, go together. For the past 15 years, a small religious community in the Indian state of Maharashtra has been living that proverb out, not as a slogan on a wall, but as a daily commitment, village by village, family by family, one quiet conversation at a time.

They have not been moving fast. That is the point.

The Society of the Divine Word, known by its Latin acronym SVD, has been walking alongside one of India's most forgotten communities—the Katkari people—since 2010. What they have built together in the years since is not easily measured in statistics, though the statistics are real. It is better measured in something harder to quantify: restored dignity, recovered voice, and the stubborn, slow-burning kind of hope that does not flicker out when the cameras leave.



Photo: Gaiita Sriniyas, via Pexels

A people made invisible

The Katkari are a tribal community in Maharashtra's Raigad district, about 160 kilometres south of Mumbai. They make up more than a third of the district's tribal population. Yet most people in India—let alone elsewhere in the world—have never heard of them.

This is not an accident. Generations of structural neglect have rendered the Katkari effectively invisible. They are largely landless. Unemployment is widespread. Child marriage remains common.

Many families survive through seasonal migration, following work that barely covers their needs and constantly uproots them from everything familiar.

As Indian cities expand and industrialise, Katkari communities find themselves stranded—small islands of poverty surrounded by a world moving quickly in a direction that does not include them.

Poverty, as Pope Leo XIV wrote in his recent apostolic exhortation *Dilexi Te,* is never only about empty stomachs or broken homes. It is about erasure—cultural, social, spiritual. It is about losing your voice until, eventually, even you forget you once had one.

The Katkari know this erasure intimately. They have been pushed to the margins so systematically, for so long, that they have nearly disappeared.

A different kind of arrival

Most development interventions arrive in communities like this with clipboards, project timelines, and exit strategies. They come with good intentions. They sometimes do good. But they almost always leave—and when they do, the underlying conditions remain largely unchanged.

The SVD's approach, through its local arm, Janseva Society, was different from the start. When the SVD director arrived in Tala in 2013, he did not come as a visiting expert or a project manager on a short-term assignment. He moved there. Permanently. He chose to share the Katkari's daily reality—the rutted roads that become rivers during monsoon season, the community celebrations that make poverty bearable, and the everyday indignities that make it unbearable.

That choice sent a message no programme document ever could. It said, simply: you are not problems to be solved. You are people worth knowing. Your lives matter enough to share.

The SVD listened first—not with surveys, but through patient, open-ended conversations over many months. What do you need? What do you dream about for your children? What has been tried before, and why did it not work? The Katkari named their own priorities. The SVD became partners in pursuing them.

Small rebellions in eight villages

Today, women's self-help groups are running in eight Katkari villages, and what is happening inside them is quietly extraordinary.

Katkari women—many of whom had little formal education, no independent access to money, and no experience of organising collectively—are learning their legal rights, managing shared savings, and supporting one another through difficult decisions.

Today, women's self-help groups are running in eight Katkari villages

Among the most significant: resisting child marriage. Mothers who once accepted that a daughter would be married off at 13 or 14 are now insisting those daughters stay in school. That shift does not happen because someone told them it should. It happened because the women found each other, built trust, and discovered they were not alone in wanting something different.

When Covid-19 pushed schools online in 2020, Katkari children disappeared from education almost overnight. No Internet access. No devices. No one in government is scrambling to solve the problem for communities this marginalised. The SVD organised supplementary classes across the villages and kept learning going.

It was not a large intervention by any measure. But for the children it reached, it was the difference between staying connected to school or losing those years entirely.

Meanwhile, SVD staff have worked steadily to help families obtain the identity documents that most people take for granted: caste certificates, ration cards, and land papers. This work sounds administrative. In practice, it is transformative. For communities rendered legally invisible, documentation is a form of recognition. It is the state acknowledging, on paper, that you exist—and that you have rights.

Building something that stays

One of the most tangible changes has come through a goat-rearing project run by the women's self-help groups. Small herds, carefully managed. Offspring are sold when the time is right. Savings accumulated over months and years.

The income is modest—nothing like what a city job might pay. But it offers something seasonal migration cannot: stability. The ability to stay home. To raise your children in one place. To build something that compounds over time, rather than spending every year starting over somewhere new.

Two villages now have community halls, built through collective effort. They are more than buildings. For communities long told — explicitly and implicitly—that they do not quite belong, that they are temporary, that they should move along, these halls make a concrete, physical counter-argument. They say, "This is your place." You are not passing through. You are home.

On Adivasi Day and International Women's Day, Katkari children perform traditional dances and songs. Their artwork fills the walls of schools and community spaces. Their voices fill rooms that usually silence them. These celebrations are not token gestures toward inclusion. They are something more serious: an insistence that Katkari culture has value, that it deserves to be carried forward, and that it is something to be proud of rather than ashamed of.

A model worth knowing

Pope Leo's exhortation *Dilexi Te* calls on Catholics—and implicitly, on all people of goodwill—to embody love not as a sentiment but as a practice: to stand in solidarity with those whom society has pushed aside, not from a comfortable distance, but up close, through sustained presence and genuine relationship.

The SVD's work in Tala is a practical demonstration of what that looks like. They have not admired the Katkari's situation from afar. They have moved in, stayed, listened, organised, celebrated, and advocated—year after year, without fanfare, in the kind of slow and faithful way that rarely makes headlines but changes lives.

What Tala's villages look like today is different from what they looked like in 2010. Farmers work land they own. Children are completing school that their mothers fought to keep them in. Women lead community initiatives. Young people are building futures without having to leave. These changes did not happen because an organisation delivered services to passive recipients. They happened because people found one another, built power together, and decided their lives were worth changing.

The SVD walked alongside that process. That is not nothing. In fact, it may be the most important thing.

What goes far

There is something about the pace of this work that deserves acknowledgement. In an era of rapid-response interventions, viral campaigns, and impact metrics measured in months, the SVD's 15-year commitment to one small region, one marginalised community, is almost counter-cultural.

It will not make a flashy documentary. There is no single dramatic turning point to build a story around. There are only years of showing up—at community meetings, in women's groups, in government offices filing paperwork, at celebrations where children dance and elders watch—and the slow accumulation of trust that makes everything else possible.

The African proverb does not promise speed. It promises distance. In Tala, that slow, steady journey together has covered territory that no quick intervention ever could.

One village. One family. One conversation at a time. That is not fast. But it goes very, very far.

Notice Board

What do you Reckon?

Reflections and actions in Lent



In this 40-day period leading up to Easter, and as a Catholic, I have done more reflections on my faith. This time allows me to confront internal conflicts, such as temptations, pride, and comfort that lead me away from God. I focus on abstaining from earthly desires through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving to the poor. This season represents hope and rebirth rather than hopelessness.

—Ellen Clementir Asencio



Growing up as a Gen Z Catholic, I've seen how technology shapes life, but Lent keeps me rooted in tradition. As I become more aware of my faith, this season has become a time for learning, reflection, and growth. Lent isn't just about rituals; it's about opening my heart to God through prayer, sacrifices, practicing forgiveness, and developing self-discipline. Even if I don't fully understand everything, I'm using this season to improve myself.

— Demple Alexis Del Campo



In Lent, I focus on deepening my faith, growing spiritually, and strengthening my relationship with God. I start each day with prayer, take moments to converse with God, and make sacrifices with good intentions. I strive to assist others in need. To me, Lent isn't about being perfect; it's about growing deeper in faith.

—Rodalyn de Vera



The three pillars of Lent are prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. We deepen our prayer life through reading scripture and incorporating prayer into daily actions. We fast, such as avoiding meat on Fridays, and limit indulgences like excessive social media. We practice charity and avoid harmful speech. Above all, we should remember that God loves us so much he gave his only Son. These practices should be lived year-round.

— Mariline Duque



In Lent, I first go to confession and seek forgiveness from Jesus. I attend Mass regularly, spend time in adoration, reduce social media use, and help others without being asked. I also read the daily Gospel, reflect on it, and participate in online Mass. Praying the Rosary and reflecting on Jesus's Paschal Mystery helps me fully engage in Lent. Our Christian life centres around the pillars of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

— Grace Loguinsa



I engage in Lent through prayer and meditation. I practice fasting by limiting food and abstaining from gossip and distractions. I remove anything that interferes with my prayer time. I also share blessings through almsgiving, helping by sharing food with the hungry and visiting the sick, along with praying for those in need and for the faithful departed.

— Lorna D. Magtoto

Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me

— Matthew 25:40

Community

Cantonese-speaking community in Diocese of East Anglia welcomes Year of the Horse



Canon Minh beating the drum to make a fresh start for a new year. Photo: Cantonese Chaplaincy RCDEA

The Cantonese Chaplaincy in the East Anglia Catholic Diocese celebrated Lunar New Year with a party held at Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Sawston on February 28, with 84 attendees from the region and beyond. The event began with a Thanksgiving Mass in Cantonese, celebrated by Canon John Minh, assisted by Deacon Peter Ho who will be ordained in July 2026.

Despite Lent, red vestments were worn, symbolising auspiciousness and the blood of Chinese Catholic martyrs. The celebration blends ancient Chinese tradition with Lent's penitential reflection, emphasizing gratitude, reconciliation, and redemption through Christ.

Deacon Ho delivered his first Gospel proclamation and homily in Cantonese, impressing the congregation with his zeal. He proclaimed the Gospel of John, highlighting Jesus as the light of the world and the source of spiritual renewal.

The Mass concluded with a solemn blessing for faith, hope, and charity throughout the Year of the Horse.

Following Mass, a traditional party was held in the hall featuring a lion dance, with the troupe paying respect to the crucifix, and interactive activities like riddle-solving with biblical and cultural themes, and a calligraphy session to preserve cultural heritage among younger generations.

The community expressed gratitude to Bishop Peter Collins of East Anglia, Canon John Minh, other clergy supporting the Cantonese ministry as well as the diocese of Hong Kong as it marks its 80th anniversary.

The day ended with a special Cantonese song about God's blessings composed by a talented musician in the community about the blessings received from God.

Dominic Chung/SE

Penance

My weakness came over me
The ills I failed to see
In my errs please set me free
Guide me with your hands and lead my way

I promised myself to honor you my God
Though sometimes
I'm troublesome and bad
Your mercy, you let me have
Now I know the meaning of
your unconditional love

I'm so weak and I'm so wrong
My Lord, my heart to you belong
I'll face your trials day by day
For your guidance I always pray

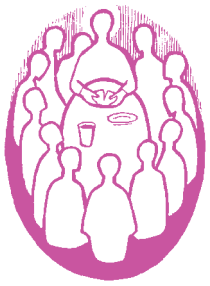
Lord I beg for your mercy
A sinner I don't want to be
Show me the right way
I'll follow it Lord for your glory

Who am I to refuse your love
You're the only Saviour I had
Your protection Lord I'll need
In my sins my heart do bleed

You're the cure for my ailing soul
Lord I'll follow your call
Immerse me in your goodness
Let me live in holiness

Napoleon Torres III





YOUR DAILY MASS GUIDE

MARCH 15 – FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT. Mass of the day, *Creed*, preface of Fourth Sunday of Lent (violet/rose). Readings:
1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a;
Ephesians 5:8-14;
John 9:1-41.

MARCH 16 – MONDAY: FOURTH WEEK OF LENT. Mass of the day, preface for Lent (purple). Readings:
Isaiah 65:17-21;
John 4:43-54.

MARCH 17 – TUESDAY: FOURTH WEEK OF LENT. Mass of the day, preface for Lent (purple). Readings:
Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12;
John 5:1-16.

MARCH 18 – WEDNESDAY: FOURTH WEEK OF LENT. Mass of the day, preface for Lent (purple). Readings:
Isaiah 49:8-15;
John 5:17-30.

MARCH 19 – ST. JOSEPH, HUSBAND OF MARY. Mass of the solemnity, *Gloria, Creed*, preface of St. Joseph (white). Readings:
2 Samuel 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 16;
Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24a.

MARCH 20 – FRIDAY: FOURTH WEEK OF LENT. Mass of the day, preface for Lent (purple). Readings:
Wisdom 2: 1a, 12-22;
John 7:1-2, 10. 25-30.

MARCH 21 – SATURDAY: FOURTH WEEK OF LENT. Mass of the day, preface for Lent (purple). Readings:
Jeremiah 11:18-20;
John 7:40-53.

Apostleship of Prayer

Themes for March 2026

FOR DISARMAMENT AND PEACE

Let us pray that nations move toward effective disarmament, particularly nuclear disarmament, and that world leaders choose the path of dialogue and diplomacy instead of violence.

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Readings: 1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

There's a light that never sets

There are things we can see clearly in life, and there are other things that escape us. Today science allows us to examine, measure, and analyse almost everything. And yet, despite all this knowledge, something essential can still remain hidden.

The Gospel reminds us today that true light comes from Christ. As the prologue of the Gospel says, "The true light that enlightens everyone was coming into the world." Jesus comes not only to heal physical blindness, but to illuminate the deeper blindness of the human heart.

The story of the man born blind is not only about one man in ancient Jerusalem. It is about all of us. In the early Church this Gospel was read during Lent because the catechumens preparing for baptism recognised themselves in this man. Before encountering Christ, they were blind. Through baptism they were enlightened.

They begin the story with a question that people still ask today: "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" They assume that suffering must be punishment. Jesus rejects this idea immediately. He refuses to blame the man or his family. Instead, he shifts the question completely. The real issue is not who is guilty, but how the light of God can shine even in darkness.

Then Jesus performs a strange gesture. He makes mud with saliva and places it on the blind man's eyes. This gesture recalls the creation of humanity in the Book of Genesis, when God formed the human being from the dust of the earth. It is as if Jesus is creating again, giving a new beginning, a new humanity.

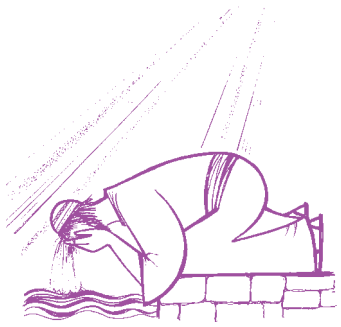
But the healing is not immediate. The man must go and wash in the pool of Siloam. He must walk in trust before he can see. Faith is often like that: we begin walking before we fully understand.

The real drama begins not with the miracle but with the reaction of the people. The neighbours are confused. The authorities interrogate him. His parents are afraid. The religious leaders refuse to believe what happened. In this story, the one who was blind begins to see more and more clearly, while those who claim to see become increasingly blind. The greatest blindness is not ignorance—it is the refusal to see.

At first the man simply calls Jesus "the man called Jesus." Then he recognises him as a prophet. Later he understands that he must be from God. Finally, when he meets Jesus again, he calls him Lord and worships him.

This is the journey of faith. It is gradual. It grows step by step.

The man who knew he was blind receives sight. Those who believed they possessed the light remain in darkness. Lent invites us to recognise our own blindness to open us to the light that never sets. Christ comes into our darkness so that we may become children of light. Let us ask for the humility to say: "Lord, help me see."



● **Father Josekutty Mathew** CMF

Ang himala ng pananampalataya at kapayapaan

Isang bagay ang alam ko: dati akong bulag ngunit ngayo'y nakakikita na."

Muli ay ipinakita ni Hesus ang kapangyarihan ng Diyos. Ang taong ipinanganak na bulag ay muling nakakita. Ayon sa pananaw ng mga tao nuon, ang isang may kararamdaman o kapansanan ay dahilan sa kasalanan nya o ng kanyang mga magulang. Kaya ang mga may sakit ay iniiwasan at di tanggap sa lipunan o maging sa bahay dalanginan. Ika nga ay outsiders sila o itsa pwera. Dito ipinakita ni Hesus ang Habag at kagandahang loob ng Diyos. Ang milagro ng pagkakita ng isang bulag at himala ng Pagasa. Nakabalik muli ang lalaki sa kanyang pamilya at komunidad. Higit sa lahat ay nakita at nakilala nya si Hesus at syay sumapalataya.

Ngayong panahon ng Kwaresma, hingin natin Kay Hesus na imulat ang ating mga mata sa katotohanan. Bigyan ng Liwanag ang ating paningin at makita natin ang kanyang pagmamahal. Ang mamulat din ang ating mga mata sa paangangailangan ng mga dukha. Ang mabukas ang ating mga puso at makita natin ang mga mahihirap na kailangan ang ating Habag at Malasakit.



● **Father Arnold Abelardo** CMF

Who are the Georgia martyrs?



The Georgia martyrs were Spanish Franciscan friars who volunteered to work for the evangelization of the native people of Florida. In the 16th century, Spain had seen a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit expressing itself in a new zeal for living the Gospel and proclaiming its message of God's love to the New World.

St. Francis, in his Rule of Life, had long before challenged the friars "who by divine inspiration desire to go among the Saracens (Muslims) and other nonbelievers." He quoted to them the words of Jesus: "Whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (Luke 9:24). Five men who accepted that challenge came to the Georgia missions, a particularly dangerous assignment in the territory of the already restless nation of the Guale, a Native American tribe.

Pedro de Corpa and Antonio de Bádajoz were two Franciscans who arrived in Florida in 1587, serving for a decade in missionary work before their deaths. Pedro was a friar priest from near Madrid, while Antonio, a lay friar from Extremadura, received special training to assist in missions. Pedro worked in Tolomato, Georgia, a significant site symbolizing Spanish authority, whereas Antonio, fluent in the Guale language, aided Father Miguel de Añon at St. Catherine's Island. Blas Rodríguez, another uniformed priest from the same strict community, joined them in 1590, serving at the mission in Tupiquí.

In 1597, priests Miguel de Añon and Francisco de Veráscola arrived in Florida. Miguel, likely of noble lineage and a former commissary in Spain, almost missed his mission due to a preaching call in Havana. However, he felt drawn back to Florida and joined Antonio on St. Catherine's Island.

Francisco, born on 13 February 1564, in the Basque country, arrived in 1595. He died two years later, with his mission recently identified as the site near Fort King George in Georgia.

The courageous defense of truth by the Georgia martyrs makes them witnesses for 21st-century America. They died for the sanctity of marriage. The catalyst for their death was their refusal to allow a baptized Catholic to take a second wife.

It was the practice of the friars to explain Christ's teaching on the unity and indissolubility of marriage to candidates for baptism. Thus when a young convert named Juanillo, a candidate for the role of chief among the Guales, made clear his intention to take a second wife, Fray Pedro exhorted him not to do so, saying that if he persisted, the friars could not lend their support to his desire to be chief.

Juanillo left the mission to return under cover of darkness with a band of pagan Guale from the interior. Pedro was bludgeoned to death. The rebellious Guale then killed similarly all the "troublesome friars" as they called them, who interfered with their having many wives.

The Georgia martyrs bore heroic witness to the sacredness of marriage, that sacredness taught by Jesus the Lord, declared by the Second Vatican Council, defended by St. Paul VI, and explained by St. John Paul II.

Pope Francis recognized the friars' deaths as martyrdom 27 January 2025, paving way for their beatification. They are expected to be beatified 31 October 2026, in Savannah.

But why the recognition? Canonising martyrs does not increase their happiness, but the recognition of their witness to the faith moves us to imitate their courage. No one would deny that we need such a witness.

Father Conrad Harkins
OSV News
Abridged by SE



Smoke rises from a burning building hit by an Iranian drone strike, after in the Seef district of Manama, Bahrain, on February 28. Photo: OSV News/Stringer, Reuters

Caritas Philippines warns fossil fuel dependence fuels war and hardship

MANILA (LICAS NEWS): Caritas Philippines has warned that the escalating conflict in the Middle East underscores the dangers of global dependence on fossil fuels. The organisation urged governments to accelerate the transition to renewable energy, framing it as essential for achieving peace and economic justice.

In a pastoral statement issued on March 4, the Philippine Catholic Church's social action arm expressed "grave concern over the escalating violence in the Middle East, particularly the military strikes involving the United States and Israel against Iran." The group warned that this confrontation risks widening instability across the region.

The organisation said the war threatens to deepen humanitarian suffering in a region already marked by decades of conflict, describing it as "an unjust assault on human dignity".

Caritas Philippines warned that such violence "weakens the moral foundations of the international order and undermines the primacy of diplomacy and dialogue."

The group also raised concerns about the potential impact on migrant workers and their families, noting that overseas Filipino workers "now face uncertainty, fear, and possible displacement."

Beyond the immediate security crisis, Caritas Philippines argued that the conflict reflects deeper structural problems rooted in the global fossil fuel economy.

"Yet this crisis also reveals a deeper and often ignored reality: the fossil fuel economy continues to shape geopolitical conflict," the group said.

The organisation added that strategic energy corridors, such as the Strait of Hormuz, have become flashpoints where military power, economic interests, and dependence on oil intersect.

"When oil becomes entangled with war, the consequences ripple across the world—especially for vulnerable economies like the Philippines."

Caritas Philippines warned that rising oil prices quickly translate into hardship for ordinary Filipinos.

"For Filipino families, rising oil prices mean immediate hardship: higher transport fares, rising food costs, increasing electricity bills, and deeper economic insecurity," the group said.

The group added that the Philippines' dependence on imported fossil fuels leaves the country exposed to geopolitical tensions and volatile global markets.

"The Philippines remains dangerously dependent on imported coal, oil, and gas," the statement said, noting that such reliance "ties our national stability to conflicts beyond our control and exposes our people to the shocks of volatile global energy markets."

Caritas Philippines said the crisis should serve as a wake-up call for policymakers to accelerate the country's transition towards renewable energy.

"Renewable energy is a peace strategy, a justice strategy, and a national survival strategy and not simply a solution to the climate crisis," it added.

The organisation also cautioned against expanding domestic oil and gas exploration, citing global energy analyses showing that new fossil fuel projects now take significantly longer to develop and may carry financial risks as the world shifts towards cleaner energy.

Calling for political leaders to prioritise diplomacy and energy reform, the group said the current crisis demands a decisive change in direction.

"We cannot continue investing in a system that fuels both climate destruction and conflict," Caritas Philippines said. "Peace is built on justice. And justice today demands an energy conversion."

Cambodian Catholic youth walk for peace and reconciliation



PHNOM PENH (RVA NEWS): About 300 pilgrims joined the 15th Catholic Youth Pilgrimage in Battambang Province, Cambodia, roughly 300 kilometres west of Phnom Penh, from February 27 to March 1.

The vicariate's Office for Children, Adolescents, and Youth organised the three-day event, themed "Youth and Reconciliation for Peacebuilding."

One of the key moments during the event was a 20-kilometre walking journey on February 28 from Thmor Koul District to Mary Mother of God Parish [Tumpung]. This symbolic act of unity and perseverance brought participants together and set the tone for the next sessions.

Sun Saruon, head of the organising office, said the annual pilgrimage helps young people understand reconciliation and peacebuilding within their hearts, families, and communities.

"This pilgrimage calls youth to actively build peace in the Church and society," he said, noting that mutual support during the demanding trek visibly showed solidarity and growth. He also urged personal development and the avoidance of social vices such as gambling and drugs.

Teachings on peace and virtue

There were two catechetical sessions led by Bishop Olivier Schmitthaeusler, apostolic vicar of Phnom Penh.

In the first session, focused on inner peace and reconciliation, the bishop reminded the youth that peace begins with a relationship with God. "Peace is not merely the absence of war, but the presence of harmony and a life of relationships filled with the joy of God," he said. He encouraged them to become "ambassadors of reconciliation" and "ambassadors of peace" in their communities.



Participants of the 15th Catholic Youth Pilgrimage of the Vicariate of Phnom Penh. Photo: RVA News

In the second session, delivered after part of the walking journey and a lunch break, he reflected on virtues vital for peacebuilding.

The bishop emphasised compassion and love as core Christian values, reminding youth that God is love and that forgiveness must guide their relationships. He urged humility and service, presenting the Virgin Mary as a model of gentleness and peace, and called for purity of mind, warning against hatred and division.

"Hate is not the path to building peace," he said. "As Christians, we build peace through prayer, forgiveness, and reconciliation."

Youth reflections

Participants shared how the pilgrimage deepened their understanding of forgiveness and solidarity.

Yat Kanha, from the Chamlak community in Tboung Khmum Province, admitted that she had previously struggled to forgive others and often held grudges. She said the programme helped her realise that peace must begin within the individual, adding that she hopes to share these lessons with other youth in her parish.

Salesian Brother Eng Sarong described the walk as a reflection of life's journey. Despite fatigue and physical pain, he said, the young pilgrims encouraged one another with love. "Catholics will always encounter obstacles, but we must walk with God at all times," he said.

The pilgrimage concluded with bishops from Cambodia's three jurisdictions, along with priests, religious brothers, and sisters. This closing gathering showed young Catholics' renewed commitment to foster reconciliation and peace in their communities and highlighted the event's lasting impact.



Nearly 1500 graduates were conferred degrees and diplomas during the ceremony attended by distinguished guests. Photo: supplied

Saint Francis University celebrates graduating class of 2025

HONG KONG (SE): Saint Francis University [SFU] held a two-day graduation ceremony for the Class of 2025 on February 28. The event marked the conferment of master's, bachelor's and associate degrees, as well as higher diplomas and diplomas, on more than 1,470 graduates—an increase of approximately seven per cent from last year.

Nearly half of this year's graduates majored in nursing, physiotherapy or social work.

The ceremony was officiated by Cardinal Stephen Chow, S.J., chairperson of the board of governors and bishop of the Diocese of Hong Kong; Denis Chang Khen-lee S.C., chairperson of the university council; Father Peter Choy Wai-man, vice-chairperson of the board of governors and vicar general; Father Joseph Yim Tak-lung, vice-chairperson of the university council and chief executive of Caritas-Hong Kong; and Professor Stephen Cheung Yan-leung, president. Together, they joined the graduates and their families in celebrating this significant milestone.

For the 2025 academic year, SFU's student enrolment also increased by over five per cent year-on-year. The university will continue to develop and launch new programmes at various levels, offering students diverse study pathways aligned with evolving socioeconomic developments.

Professor Stephen Cheung extended his heartfelt congratulations to the graduates in a video message, encouraging them to persevere and apply their professional knowledge in real-world settings. "I sincerely hope they will draw inspiration from the University's motto, *Ad Destinatum Persequor* [With zeal and perseverance, strive towards the goal], and strive to excel not only in Hong Kong but also across our nation, where they can fully realise their potential and pursue a bright future," he said.

He added that the steady increase in both graduate numbers and student enrolments demonstrates the university's pioneering role in advancing the University of Applied Sciences model.

Reflecting SFU's strong partnerships with industry, several distinguished leaders were invited to share their insights at the ceremony. These included Lam Ching-choi, chief executive officer of Haven of Hope Christian Service and non-official member of the Executive Council of the Hong Kong government; Derrick Pang Yat-bond, executive vice president of the Hong Kong Young Industrialists Council and chief executive officer of Asia Allied Infrastructure Holdings Limited; Sylvia Fung Yuk-kuen, president of the Hong Kong Academy of Nursing & Midwifery; and William Chui Chun-ming, chief pharmacist at the Hospital Authority.

This year's ceremony held special significance for the SFU community, as it coincided with the second anniversary of its retitling—a milestone marked by notable achievements and continued progress.

It was also the final year that SFU and the former Caritas Bianchi College of Careers jointly hosted the ceremony, as the latter has now become an academic department within the university.



Cardinal Stephen, the chairperson of the board of governors. Photo: supplied

The university will continue to develop and launch new programmes at various levels, offering students diverse study pathways aligned with evolving socioeconomic developments

Diocese hosts talk on Northern Metropolis development



Professor Ling, right, answering participant's questions. Photo: supplied

HONG KONG (SE): The Diocesan Building and Development Commission hosted a talk on February 10 at the Catholic Diocese Centre to gain a better understanding of the Northern Metropolis initiative launched by the Hong Kong government, exploring its significance for the mission and services of the diocese and Caritas.

Professor Ling Kar-kan, chairperson of the Hong Kong Housing Society, former director of Planning of the HKSAR Government, and past president of the Hong Kong Institute of Planners, was the guest speaker.

Cardinal Stephen Chow, S.J., delivered the opening remarks. Other attendees included Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha Chi-Shing; Philip Kwok, chairperson of the Diocesan Building and Development Commission; Professor Anthony Yeh, chairperson of the Research and Development Committee; and representatives from the educational and social welfare sectors of the diocese and Caritas.

Cardinal Stephen thanked Professor Ling for his presentation on the background, vision and development strategy of the Northern Metropolis, which provided valuable insights for the diocese and Caritas. He emphasised the strong link between the Church's mission—including evangelisation, education and social services—and Hong Kong's development, highlighting that the initiative offers new opportunities to expand pastoral and community outreach to better meet the needs of local residents.

Ling, who previously served as Strategic Planning Adviser for Hong Kong/Shenzhen Co-operation in the HKSAR Government, played a significant role in shaping the Northern Metropolis concept. In 2016, as Director of Planning, he introduced "Hong Kong 2030+: Towards a Planning Vision and Strategy Transcending 2030", laying the groundwork for development in the northern New Territories.

During the talk, he outlined the background, vision, targets, and action plans for the Northern Metropolis. Spanning approximately 30,000 hectares across Yuen Long and North Districts, with over 3,000 hectares of newly developed land, the Northern Metropolis is set to become a major economic powerhouse for Hong Kong.

Once completed, the development is projected to accommodate around 2.5 million residents, offer approximately 500,000 housing units, and create an estimated 500,000 jobs.

Ling noted that a primary goal of the initiative is to address the long-standing imbalance between housing and employment in Hong Kong. Many New Territories residents currently endure lengthy commutes to urban districts for work, impacting their well-being and family life. By generating more local job opportunities, the Northern Metropolis aims to reduce commuting times and improve quality of life.

He also introduced major projects within the initiative, such as the San Tin Technopole, Northern Metropolis University Town, New Territories North New Town, and proposed new railway links including the Hong Kong–Shenzhen Western Rail Link.

Concluding his talk, Ling quoted the *Book of Han,* an ancient Chinese classic: "These [measures] are to make people live cheerfully and cultivate a sense of belonging in the place they call home."

He emphasised that, beyond economic growth, the initiative ultimately seeks to enhance quality of life and foster pride in Hong Kong's achievements.

The Northern Metropolis represents a pivotal urban development for Hong Kong over the next twenty years, set to significantly transform the northern New Territories. Forward planning will be essential to meet the needs of these emerging communities.

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