



Cardinal Jose Advincula presides over New Year's Eve Mass at the Manila Cathedral on Dec. 31, 2023. ERIC PAUL GUANLAO/MANILA CATHEDRAL

Manila archbishop encourages 'pilgrimages of prayer'

THE head of Manila's Roman Catholic Church is bringing in the new year with a call for what he called 'pilgrimages of prayer.'

Cardinal Jose Advincula encouraged the faithful of his archdiocese to return to the core importance of prayer.

Prayer / A7



Jeepney operators, drivers, along with their families and other activist groups, staged a protest in Manila, urging the government to reconsider the deadline for the PUV Modernization Program, Dec. 29, 2023. PRESSONE.PH

Caritas PH urges 'just transition' in public transport modernization

THE social action arm of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) is calling for a "just and inclusive approach" to the government's public transport modernization program.

Caritas / A7

JANUARY 8 - 21, 2024 VOL. 27 NO. 1

CBCP

www.cbcnews.net

Monitor

PROTAGONIST OF TRUTH, PROMOTER OF PEACE

'Don't sign!'

Bishops warn flock vs 'people's initiative' to change 1987 charter

By FELIPE F. SALVOSA II

AT least eight bishops from the regions have warned their flock against trading their signatures for money or other inducements offered by politicians seeking to amend the 1987 Constitution.

In separate statements, the bishops of Batanes, Boac, Dipolog, Kidapawan, Legazpi, Marawi, Tagbilaran, and Taytay, Palawan questioned the signature campaign aimed at convening the Senate and the House of Representatives into a Constituent Assembly that could railroad changes to the 37-year-old charter, including lifting term limits and opening up the economy further to foreign capital.

Bishop Edwin Dela Peña of the Prelature of Marawi said he had instructed the faithful not to sign the so-called "Peoples' Initiative" as it was not the initiative of citizens.

"Sa totoo lang po, walang inisyatiba na nanggagaling sa baba na umiikot sa kasalukuyan kundi yung galing sa mga pulitiko! Kuydawo! Dapat matuto na tay sa sobrang pabigat na ipinapasan nila sa kawawa nating taong bayan," he said in a statement.

(The truth is, there is no initiative circulating from below except the one from politicians! Beware! We should learn from the heavy burden they are imposing on the people.)

Kidapawan Bishop Jose Colin Bagaforo decried the lack of public consultation in the latest charter change drive.

"Any attempt to alter the Constitution, especially when shrouded in secrecy and lacking genuine public participation, raises serious concerns about its true motives," Bagaforo said in a statement thru Caritas Philippines, the social action arm of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP).

"The country's fundamental law is not a political football to be kicked around at the whims of those in power," he said.

The clergy of the Prelature of Batanes, led by Bishop Daniel Ulep, said the means of gathering signatures was "questionable and unacceptable."

"We were told that on some occasions, our people who were asked to affix their signatures, do sign their names while being given government financial assistance," the

Batanes clergy said in a joint statement.

"From all indications, these simultaneous acts of getting signatures and giving government financial assistance at the same time has the appearance of a bribery whether directly or indirectly. It is also a form of pressure and indirect corruption brazenly committed right before our eyes," they said.

'Charter not the problem'

Bishop Marcelino Antonio Maralit of Boac said the 1987 charter, crafted by a Constitutional Commission following the country's transition to democracy after the Marcos dictatorship, was not the real problem.

He reminded the faithful that the 1987 Constitution is the only pro-God, pro-Filipino, pro-people, pro-poor, and pro-life, pro-family, pro-marriage, pro-human rights, pro-women, and pro-environment charter, citing former chief justice Hilario Davide, a member of the 1986 commission that crafted it.

"If we really think about it, we know that the system of politics and corruption is the real problem, and

Charter / A7



Cardinal Mario Grech, Secretary General of the Synod on Synodality, delivers his keynote address during the 10th Philippine Conference on New Evangelization (PCNE) at the University of Santo Tomas, Jan. 19, 2024. ROY LAGARDE

Vatican synod chief to bishops, priests: 'Synodality tells us that we are not alone'

By ROY LAGARDE

RECOGNIZING the challenges faced by bishops and priests, a Vatican official said on Friday that synodality is a "gift" to them in fulfilling their ministry.

Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary general of the Synod of Bishops, said it's a gift in a sense that priests have a way to collaborate with others.

"At times we are alone and we have to shoulder our responsibilities alone," Grech said. "But

synodality is telling us, 'No, you are not alone.' Make space for others, walk with others, listen to others."

"If we priests learn the beauty of synodality, we will be in a better position and we will really enjoy and live our priesthood joyfully," he said.

Grech said that if church leaders are able to foster a sense of "family" in parishes and dioceses, "we will be able to fulfill the command of Jesus to proclaim the Gospel to the world."

"We have to respect the

ministries and charisms of each other. We can learn from one another," he said.

The cardinal was the keynote speaker of the three-day Philippine Conference on New Evangelization (PCNE) at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila.

As the pointman for the current synod on synodality, a cornerstone of Pope Francis' papacy, Grech is seen as a torchbearer of the pope's vision for the Church.

The first of the two

Synod / A7



Devotees turn up in droves for the traditional foot procession of the Santo Niño icon on the eve of the feast of the Child Jesus in Cebu City, on Jan. 20, 2024. SAMMY NAVAJA

Over 6 million people turn up for Nazarene feast in Manila

By ROY LAGARDE

CATHOLIC devotees, estimated to be in the millions, turned up for this year's feast of the Black Nazarene in Manila.

A mammoth crowd, mostly barefoot devotees, packed the city's streets to witness the traditional procession or "Traslacion" of the Nazarene image from the Quirino Grandstand to Quiapo Church on Tuesday.

Organizers reported that as many as 6.1 million people attended the event—from the midnight Mass presided over by Cardinal Jose Advincula at the grandstand until the return of the image to Quiapo.

An estimated 939,000 people were at the grandstand, approximately 3.2 million joined the procession, and around 1.9 million were at the Quiapo Church.

The procession lasted for 15 hours, marking the fastest time in the history of the Traslacion, which commemorates the transfer of the image from



Devotees are waving towels at the start of the Black Nazarene procession at the Quirino Grandstand in Manila, Jan. 9, 2024. ROY LAGARDE

Intramuros to Quiapo more than 400 years ago.

In 2012, the longest Traslacion on record lasted 22 hours, albeit following a different and longer route.

Alex Irasga, the church's lay adviser for the Traslacion, said the image returned to the church "very clean and

without any damage."

The life-size statue of the dark-skinned Jesus Christ debuted in a glass case for the procession after three years without it because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

'Birth pains'

But on a humid, rainy

day, moisture clouded the glass enclosure, affecting everyone's view of the Black Nazarene.

"This is something that we didn't prepare for and consider (with the new design of the andas or carriage)," according to Irasga. "Maybe

Nazarene / A7

Holy See receives Bishops Álvarez, Mora, 15 priests after Nicaragua frees them

BISHOP Rolando Álvarez, who had been detained for over a year, Bishop Isidoro del Carmen Mora Ortega, two seminarians, and 15 priests have been released.

A total of 19 representatives of the Catholic Church have been freed by the Nicaraguan government.

Government officials in Managua confirmed the news, first reported by local media. All arrived in Rome on Sunday afternoon, with the exception of one who remained in Venezuela.

They are now guests of the Holy See.

Bishop Álvarez of Matagalpa and the Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Estelí, was sentenced to 26 years in prison where he had been since February last year following house arrest since August 2022. Bishop Mora was arrested in December.

During the Angelus at the beginning of the year, Pope Francis spoke of about the situation of bishops and priests "deprived of their freedom"

in the Central American nation. He assured everyone of his "closeness in prayer" and invited God's people to pray for Nicaragua, expressing his hopes "that the path of dialogue will always be sought to overcome difficulties."

Already in October, 12 Nicaraguan priests were released from prison. The Holy See accepted the request to receive them, welcoming them to Rome and providing housing. (Salvatore Cernuzio / Vatican News)

Vatican announces major restoration project in St. Peter's Basilica



Bernini's Baldacchino in St Peter's Basilica. VATICAN MEDIA

THE Vatican announced on Jan. 11 that the soaring baldacchino over the main altar of St. Peter's Basilica designed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini 400 years ago will undergo a major restoration.

The ambitious restoration and conservation project, expected to be completed just before the start of the Catholic Church's jubilee year in December, will require scaffolding to be set up around the canopy of the basilica's main altar for nearly a year.

Cardinal Mauro Gambetti, the archpriest of St. Peter's Basilica, has assured that papal liturgies will still be able to take place in the basilica amid the restoration work.

The 700,000 euro (about \$768,000) restoration is being funded by the Knights of Columbus and will be carried out by the Vatican Museums' expert art restorers.

Patrick Kelly, the head of the Knights of Columbus, was present in Rome for a press conference on Jan. 11 to announce the restoration in the basilica, calling the project "one of the greatest restorations" of the many that the Knights have funded at the Vatican in the past 40 years.

"It's Bernini's baldacchino ... It's a singular masterpiece of sacred art—one which is instantly recognizable and impressive," Kelly said.

"But, if that weren't enough, this project also fits very well with our mission and with our history of service to the Church, and especially, the successors of St. Peter."

Pope Urban VIII commissioned Bernini in 1624 to design and build the enormous canopy over the Papal Altar of the Confession, located directly over the tomb of St. Peter the Apostle.

At the Vatican press conference, Pietro Zander, the head of the artistic and archeological patrimony of the basilica, explained that a preliminary investigation found that the baldacchino had a "degraded state of conservation" and that its entire surface is covered "with a dark coating," which requires significant cleaning.

"The deterioration issues ... are in part to the many visitors and pilgrims who flock to St. Peter's Basilica every day, changing its microclimate by their presence," Zander said.

"The basilica welcomes up to

50,000 people every day," he said. "Considerable microclimatic variations during the day and strong changes in temperature and humidity between day and night interact with the canopy, causing alterations and corrosion of the metal; oxidation of the iron supports and reinforcements; and expansion of the wooden parts with consequent lifting and detachment of layers on its surface."

Zander indicated that further study of the "microclimate of the basilica" will also help to form a conservation plan for all of the artistic works in the basilica.

The restoration work will begin on Feb. 12, one day after Pope Francis is scheduled to preside over the canonization of Argentina's first saint in a Mass in St. Peter's Basilica.

Alberto Capitanucci, who leads the technical team of "Fabric of St. Peter" the office responsible for the conservation and maintenance of St. Peter's Basilica, expects that it will take about four weeks to put up the scaffolding, which will enable a team of 10-12 experts to work each day on the restoration of the baldacchino. (Courtney Mares / CNA)

Vatican Briefing

Pope Francis: 'War itself is a crime against humanity'

Pope Francis made a strong appeal for peace on Jan. 14 calling modern warfare "a crime against humanity" that sows death among civilians and destroys cities. Speaking at the end of his Angelus address, the pope urged people to pray for all who are suffering due to "the cruelty of war," especially in Ukraine, Palestine, and Israel. "We pray that those who have power over these conflicts will reflect that war is not the way to resolve them because it sows death among civilians and destroys cities and infrastructure. In other words, war today is in itself a crime against humanity," Pope Francis said. "Let's not forget this: War itself is a crime against humanity. People need peace. The world needs peace." (CNA)

Pope Francis at audience: Gluttony is perhaps the most dangerous vice

In the third instalment of his catechetical series on vice and virtue, Pope Francis on Wednesday focused on the sin of gluttony, noting that the vice is not about "food in itself, but on our relationship with it." Framing Wednesday's general audience on the social and psychological impact of this vice, the 87-year-old pontiff underscored that "gluttony is perhaps the most dangerous vice, which is killing the planet." "The sin of those who succumb before a piece of cake, all things considered, does not cause great damage, but the voracity with which we have been plundering the goods of the planet for some centuries now is compromising the future of all," Pope Francis said to the faithful gathered in the Paul VI Audience Hall on Jan. 10. (CNA)

Argentine nuns now living in Vatican monastery that was Pope Benedict's last residence

Vatican City has new tenants: seven nuns from Argentina who, at the request of Pope Francis, will live in Mater Ecclesiae ("Mother of the Church"), the monastery where Pope Benedict XVI resided for almost a decade following his resignation from the papacy. The group consists of six Benedictine nuns and their abbess who were previously living out their religious vocation at St. Scholastica Abbey in the town of Victoria, located in Buenos Aires province in the Diocese of San Isidro, Argentina. The nuns landed in Rome on the morning of Jan. 3 and were received by Cardinal Fernando Vérgez Alzaga, president of the Governorate of Vatican City State, responsible for everything concerning the monastery. Pope Francis in a letter dated Oct. 1, 2023, ordered that the place "return to its original purpose," which is for "contemplative orders to support the Holy Father in his daily concern for the entire Church, through the ministry of prayer, adoration, praise, and reparation, thus being a prayerful presence in silence and solitude." (CNA)

Pope Francis: If you don't know the date of your baptism, look it up

Pope Francis said Sunday that if you do not know the date of your baptism, you need to look it up so that you can celebrate the anniversary of becoming a child of God and heir to the kingdom of heaven. Speaking from the window of the Vatican's Apostolic Palace, the pope said on Jan. 7 that the anniversary of one's baptism should be celebrated each year "like a birthday." "At baptism, it is God who comes into us, purifies and heals our heart, makes us forever his children, his people and family, heirs to paradise," Pope Francis said. "Let us ask ourselves: Am I aware of the immense gift I carry within me through baptism?" he added. (CNA)

Italian priest excommunicated for calling Pope Francis a 'usurper'

An Italian priest has been excommunicated by his local bishop for saying in a homily that Pope Francis "is not the pope" and calling him "a usurper." The Diocese of Livorno in Tuscany issued a decree on Jan. 1 notifying Catholics that Father Ramon Guidetti "publicly committed a schismatic act" during Mass and has ipso facto incurred "latae sententiae excommunication," or an automatic excommunication. Bishop Simone Giusti informed his diocese that Catholics are not to attend any Masses offered by the excommunicated priest or they would also "incur the very serious penalty of excommunication." The bishop cited Canon 751, which defines schism as "the refusal of submission to the Supreme Pontiff or of communion with the members of the Church subject to him." A video uploaded to YouTube shows Guidetti calling Pope Francis a "usurper" and a "freemason" in his homily given on Dec. 31, 2023, to mark the one-year anniversary of Benedict XVI's death. In the homily, the priest further denied that Pope Francis has been the pope for the last decade. (CNA)

Pope Francis: Never forget that Jesus is beside you in your worst moments

In life's worst moments, never forget that Jesus is beside you, Pope Francis said Wednesday. In his first general audience of the new year, the pope set aside his prepared remarks to share a message from his heart: "Jesus never leaves us alone, never!" "In our worst moments, in the moments when we slip into sins, Jesus is beside us to help us lift ourselves up," Pope Francis said in the Vatican's Paul VI Hall on Jan. 3. "We must not lose this certainty: Jesus is beside us to help us, to protect us, and also to lift us up after we sin." (CNA)

Vatican: 20 Catholic missionaries killed in 2023

Twenty Catholic missionaries were murdered in 2023, according to a new Dec. 30 report issued by the Vatican's Fides News Agency. Fides, the news agency of the Pontifical Mission Societies, arrived at that number by calculating "all baptized engaged in the life of the Church who died in a violent way, not only 'in hatred of the faith.'" The agency said that most of the missionaries shared the traits of living a "normal life" and did "not carry out any sensational actions or out-of-the ordinary deeds that could have attracted attention and put them in someone's crosshairs." "They found themselves, through no fault of their own, victims of kidnappings, acts of terrorism, involved in shootings or violence of various kinds," the report said. Among those who were killed were two U.S. clergymen: Los Angeles Auxiliary Bishop David O'Connell and Nebraska parish priest Father Stephen Gutsell. The news agency reported that one bishop, eight priests, two non-religious men, one seminarian, one novice, and seven laypersons made up the missionaries murdered in the last year. The number of murders represents an increase over 2022, when 18 missionaries were killed. (CNA)

Centesimus Annus Foundation offers new courses on Catholic Social Doctrine

THE Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation has announced new courses on the Social Doctrine of the Church, under the theme "The Contribution of the Church's Social Doctrine in a World Between Crisis and Transformation."

The courses take place from 20 January to 23 March 2024, both in-person and online, under the academic direction of Monsignor Guy-Réal Thivierge.

The course will be inaugurated at the Casa Bonus Pastor in Rome by the Foundation's president, Anna Tarantola.

The 2024 High Training Course in Catholic Social Teaching aims to achieve more universal human rights and promote pathways to peace, according to a letter by Msgr. Thivierge, available on the Centesimus Annus Foundation - Pro Pontifice website.

Lessons and target audience

The course calendar details that the learning method proposed

comprises three levels: in-depth, inductive, and community wisdom.

These courses, organized for the past several years, are aimed at public and private executives, professionals, academics, entrepreneurs, religious figures, and young students preparing to enter the workforce.

The goal is to teach the principles and practices of the Church's Social Doctrine.

Course structure

The sessions include seven modules, three in-person and four online, designed as educational journeys focused on integral human development, and social friendship and cooperation.

The on-site meetings in Rome will be held at the Casa Pastor Bonus, while the remote sessions will take place from 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM (GMT+1).

Each session is structured with specialist lectures in various fields of Catholic Social Doctrine

and representatives from the economic, financial, and social spheres.

For religious participants, the course is entirely free, while a discount may be applied to young attendees at the discretion of the Foundation (requests should be sent to the General Secretariat).

Themes of the courses

The course topics include an introduction, work methodology, and the foundations of the Church's Social Doctrine.

The second session will focus on "Culture and Society." The third is dedicated to "Politics and Democracy." The fourth will address "Economic and Social Responsibility: New Challenges and Pathways."

The fifth will explore "Communication and New Technologies." The sixth will delve into "Artificial Intelligence," and the seventh will tackle "Social Transformations and Education." (Vatican News)

Synod on Synodality next steps: Pope to choose 'big questions' for further study

By MATTHEW SANTUCCI
Catholic News Agency

ROME— Pope Francis will provide input on the “big questions” to focus on at the next session of the Synod on Synodality next October, the Vatican revealed in a new document Tuesday.

Examples include questions related to the ordination of women to the diaconate, revisions to canon law pertaining to the Oriental Churches, and a review of the Vatican document Ratio Fundamentaliss, which serves as the basis for the formation of priests and deacons.

Those were among the topics deemed “matters of great relevance” that came up during the synod’s first session in October and require consideration “at the level of the whole Church and in collaboration with the dicasteries of the Roman Curia,” according to the new document.

A list of these topics will be sent to Pope Francis for review, and the pope will indicate sometime in January which topics require further study. The new document does not detail who the experts are or how they will be selected.

Released on Dec. 12 by the General Secretariat of the Synod, the Vatican office coordinating the ongoing synodal consultative process, the four-page document, titled “Towards October 2024,” details “the steps to be taken in the months between now and the Second Session of the Synodal Assembly.”

The first monthlong session of the Synod on Synodality, a multiyear process initiated by Pope Francis to enhance the communion,



Pope Francis holds his crozier during Mass marking the end of the first session of the assembly of the Synod of Bishops on synodality in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican on Oct. 29, 2023. ROY LAGARDE

participation, and mission of the Church, concluded on Oct. 29 with the finalization of a 42-page synthesis report. The October 2024 session is expected to produce a final report, which will be presented to Pope Francis for his consideration in issuing any related teaching.

The new document calls for feedback on the synthesis document from local and national levels. Emphasizing that this is not to be construed as a “question of starting the synodal process from scratch or repeating the process of listening and consultation undertaken during the first stage,” it notes that “each local Church is invited to focus on those aspects that enable it to make a contribution in the light of its own situation, character, and experience, sharing good practices that represent visible and concrete signs of synodality.”

According to the document, this

process will be a moment for dioceses to reflect on the “fundamental questions” that are to be guided by the central aim of the synod’s central question: “How can we be a synodal Church in mission?”

“The local Churches are also invited to go through the entire Synthesis Report and collect the requests that are most consonant with their situation,” the document states. “On this basis, they will be able to promote the most appropriate initiatives to involve the whole people of God.”

Once this process is complete, these various reports submitted by the dioceses will be compiled into an eight-page document and sent to the General Secretariat of the Synod by May 15, 2024, forming the basis of the Instrumentum Laboris (or working document) that will be used by assembly members of the synod’s second session in October 2024.

Report: Over 130 Catholic priests and religious arrested, kidnapped, or murdered in 2023



Nicaraguan Bishop Rolando Álvarez. FACEBOOK DIOCESE MEDIA - TV MERCED

By TYLER ARNOLD
Catholic News Agency

THROUGHOUT 2023, more than 130 Catholic priests and religious were either arrested, kidnapped, or murdered, according to a new report on Catholic persecution published by Aid to the Church in Need.

The report published by the Catholic charity found at least 132 instances of arrests, kidnappings, and/or murders, which is slightly higher than the report from the previous year, which found 124. The uptick was mostly driven by arrests from authoritarian governments, which went up from 55 in 2022 to 86 in 2023.

Nicaragua President Daniel Ortega’s crackdown on political dissent among members of the clergy was a primary driver of persecution throughout the year. The report found that the regime held 46 clergy in custody in 2023, including two bishops and four seminarians. This included 19 clerics arrested in December, including Bishop Isidoro de Carmen Mora Ortega of Siuna.

According to the report, many of the priests in Nicaragua who were arrested before December were either released or expelled from the country and refused reentry. The government also released two of the

priests arrested in December, but the other 17 are still in custody.

Bishop Rolando Álvarez, who was arrested in August 2022 and sentenced to 26 years in prison after refusing to leave the country, is also still in custody.

Ortega’s administration also expelled religious sisters such as the Missionaries of Charity and shut down Catholic schools and media organizations.

The report found that 20 members of the Catholic clergy were under arrest at some point in China throughout the year. However, the report also noted that “confirming the information is almost impossible” and some of the persecuted members of the clergy “remain unaccounted for after many years.” The number could be slightly higher or lower, according to the report.

At least five Catholic clergy and one woman religious were arrested in India in 2023, which was mostly driven by anti-conversion laws, which the report noted “impede the work of the Church.” All of them have been released but could still face charges and even prison time.

There have also been arrests in two European countries. The report found that 10 members of Catholic clergy were arrested in Belarus, three of whom are still imprisoned. Two Greek Catholic priests were

also arrested by Russian forces in Ukraine, neither of whom have been released.

The kidnapping of clergy and religious sisters went down in 2023, according to the report, but the problem “remains significant.” The total number of kidnapped clergy and religious was 33 in 2023, which is down from 54 in 2022.

All but five of the kidnappings took place in Nigeria, where religious and ethnic conflicts have made the country dangerous for Christians. The 28 kidnappings in the country included three religious women.

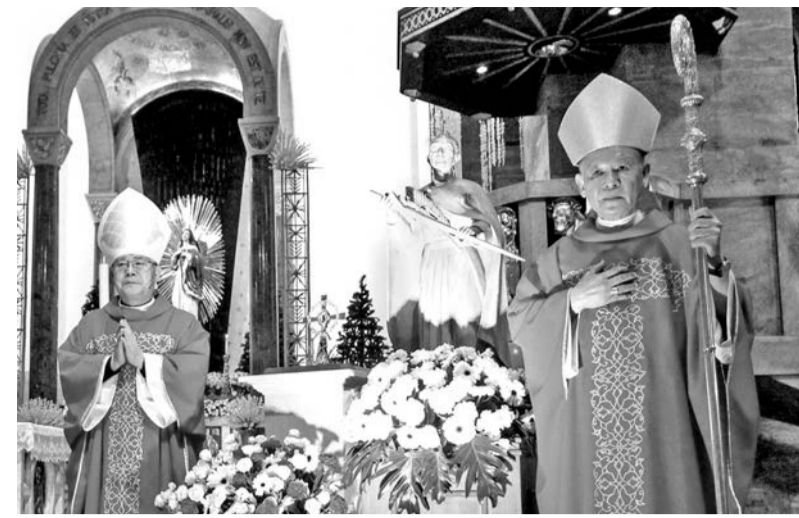
There were also two kidnappings in Haiti. One priest was kidnapped in Mali and another in Burkina Faso. One religious woman was abducted in Ethiopia.

Murders of Catholic priests and other members of the clergy slightly decreased, from 18 in the previous year to 14 in 2023. This includes 11 priests, one bishop, one religious brother, and one seminarian. However, half of these murders were unrelated to persecution or have unclear motives.

Of the seven murders that are clearly tied to persecution, three were in Nigeria. This includes Father Isaac Achi and a seminarian named Na’aman Danlami, both of whom died in their residences when they were burned down during attacks. It also includes Godwin Eze, a Benedictine brother, who was killed by kidnappers.

Other murders linked to persecution included the murder of Father Pamphili Nada in Tanzania, who was killed by a mentally unstable man; Father Javier García Villafaña, who was shot dead in Mexico; and Father Leopold Feyen, who was stabbed to death in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

“Many Christians,” the report noted, “and especially clergy and religious, paid a heavy price for their commitment to common good, human rights, and religious freedom in the communities and nations they serve.”



Cardinal Thomas Aquinas Manyo Maeda of Osaka (left) and Cardinal Jose Advincula of Manila flank an image of Blessed Takayama Ukon after a Mass at the Manila Cathedral on Dec. 21, commemorating the 409th anniversary of the Japanese Catholic Samurai and martyr's arrival in the Philippines. PATRICK DOMINICK ROMERO

Japanese cardinal reveals Vatican probe into 'miracles' for Blessed Takayama Ukon's sainthood

By ROY LAGARDE

A JAPANESE cardinal disclosed on Dec. 21 in Manila that the Vatican has been investigating ‘miracles’ that could lead to the canonization of a 17th-century Catholic Samurai and martyr.

Cardinal Thomas Aquinas Manyo Maeda of Osaka did not provide further details but expressed hope that the investigation regarding the cause of Blessed Takayama Ukon will be completed soon.

“We pray that the investigation of Ukon’s miracles will be completed and approved at least within the next year or two,” Maeda said.

“We hope that we can pray and work together with the people of the Archdiocese of Manila, especially with the archbishop of Manila,” he said.

The 74-year-old spoke after a Mass presided over by Cardinal Jose Advincula at the Manila Cathedral, commemorating the 409th anniversary of Ukon’s arrival in the country.

Maeda was on a pilgrimage with 30 Japanese pilgrims, retracing the footsteps of the martyr in Manila.

In 1614, Ukon and 350 Catholics were exiled to Manila due to the Edo Shogunate’s ban on Christianity. He died in Intramuros after only 44 days, reportedly due to “a tropical ailment.”

Pope Francis: Catholic news media can't be 'neutral' in the message they convey

By ANDRÉS HENRÍQUEZ
Catholic News Agency

POPE Francis said people working in Catholic media must not refrain from being involved in the evangelizing mission of the Church and that, therefore, “they cannot remain ‘neutral’ with respect to the message they convey.”

The pontiff made his remarks at a Jan. 4 audience with a delegation from the Society of Catholic Publicists of Germany on the 75th anniversary of its foundation.

According to Vatican News, the Holy Father also explained that “interreligious dialogue, ecumenism, and the defense of peace, freedom, and human dignity” should be the goals of communication professionals, especially if they are Catholic.

“How many conflicts today, instead of being extinguished by dialogue, are fueled by fake news or inflammatory statements in the media! That’s why it’s all the more important that you, strong in your Christian roots and in living the faith daily, ‘demilitarized’ in your heart by the Gospel, support the disarmament of language,” the pope said in his discourse, which he gave in writing to the delegation.

To achieve this “demilitarization” of language, he shared four guidelines that Catholics in the media can put into practice: “Foster a tone of peace and understanding, build bridges, be available to listen, and engage in

He was initially proposed for sainthood by the Manila archdiocese in 1634, becoming the Philippine Church’s first “Servant of God.”

Mr. Ernesto de Pedro, an alumnus of the University of Santo Tomas (UST) Graduate School, was commissioned to study the cause after the petition for Takayama’s beatification was revived in 1986.

To ensure that the movement had firm foundations, he established the Lord Justus Takayama Professional Chair in Philippine-Japanese Studies at UST on Feb. 4, 1989.

In 2013, Japan’s Catholic bishops submitted a lengthy 400-page application to the Vatican for Ukon’s beatification as a martyr, emphasizing his abandonment of warlord status and sacrifice for his faith.

Ukon’s journey to canonization advanced when Pope Francis approved the decree of his martyrdom on Jan. 22, 2016. He was beatified during a Mass in Osaka on Feb. 7, 2017.

In 2018, the Manila City Council passed a resolution declaring December 21, every year, as “Blessed Takayama Ukon Day” in the nation’s capital.

The sainthood cause of Blessed Takayama Ukon is being promoted by several Catholic movements in various countries, among them the Manila-based “Prayer Warriors of Blessed Takayama.”

respectful communication toward others and their reasons.”

He also noted that Catholic journalists have a fundamental role to play in situations involving tension and disputes by “providing correct information” to resolve misunderstandings and contributing to the construction of peace in society, “helping mutual understanding and not setting people in opposition to each other.”

Pope Francis was also emphatic in asking Catholic journalists not to be turned in on themselves but to go out and “bring the Christian message to all areas of life” using the enormous resources, platforms, and communication tools available to the modern world.

“A Church concerned above all with itself becomes ill with self-referentiality,” he warned.

In that regard, the pontiff pointed to the weakest in society as the center of attention of communication professionals. In these peripheries, Pope Francis commented, is found “the God of love, waiting for the good news of our charity.” The Holy Father pointed out the need for journalists “who highlight the stories and faces of those to whom few or no one pays attention.”

Catholics in the media should “always think of the faces of the people, especially the poor and the simple, and start from them, their reality, their dramas, and their hopes, even if doing so means going against the current” and sparing no effort, he concluded.



REJOICE IN THE TRUTH

CARDINAL ORLANDO B. QUEVEDO, OMI

Archbishop Fernando Capalla, archbishop emeritus of Davao: a tribute

THE passing away of Archbishop Nanding Capalla in Davao City on January 6 after a long lingering illness marks the end of a historic period of Mindanao Church history. That period began in 1971 with the first Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference, that momentous gathering of Mindanao Bishops, Clergy, Religious and Laity. Among the Bishops were Bishop Jesus Varela of Ozamis, Bishop Francisco Claver of Malaybalay, Bishop Jose Maria Querexeta of Basilan, Bishop Antonio Mabutas of Davao, Bishop Joseph Regan of Tagum, Bishop Gerard Mongeau of Cotabato, Bishop Carmelo Morelos of Butuan, and Bishop Charles Van den Ouwelant of Pagadian. For the Church in Mindanao, MSPC I was the beginning of a participatory Church, of laity empowerment, and of remarkable innovative pastoral initiatives.

Bishop Nanding became Auxiliary Bishop of Davao in 1975 and was near the beginning of MSPC. Like other Mindanao Bishops, he adopted the MSPC pastoral priority of building Basic Christian Communities (BCC), Gagmayng Kristohanon Katilingbang (GKK). BCC's were a pastoral trademark of the Diocese of Tagum. The BCC's, later called, Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC's), anticipated what we now call "a synodal church," a participatory church, whose members walk together towards the achieving of the church's mission.

When Bp. Nanding became Bishop of Iligan, he made Inter-Religious Dialogue and Indigenous Peoples Apostolate his major pastoral programs. In 1992, together with Governor Mahid Mutilan of the Ulama League of the Philippines and Bishop Hilario Gomez of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, he founded the Bishops Ulama Forum (BUF). The name was later changed to Bishops Ulama Conference (BUC). This was the beginning of high level inter-religious dialogue in Mindanao.

It was not until I became Bishop in 1981 that I felt the impact of the MSPC work of Inter-Religious Dialogue and Indigenous Peoples Apostolate. Bp. Claver, Bp. Capalla, and I worked together to promote IRD with Muslims and Indigenous Peoples, the latter being the most marginalized and the poorest sector of Mindanao society. The Final Statements of the MSPC are replete with ideas on option for the poor and the deprived, the oppressed and marginalized. The Bishops of Mindanao shared the vision of a Church of the Poor at the 1991 Second Plenary Council of the Philippines. The Plenary Council eventually adopted it as its over-arching vision.

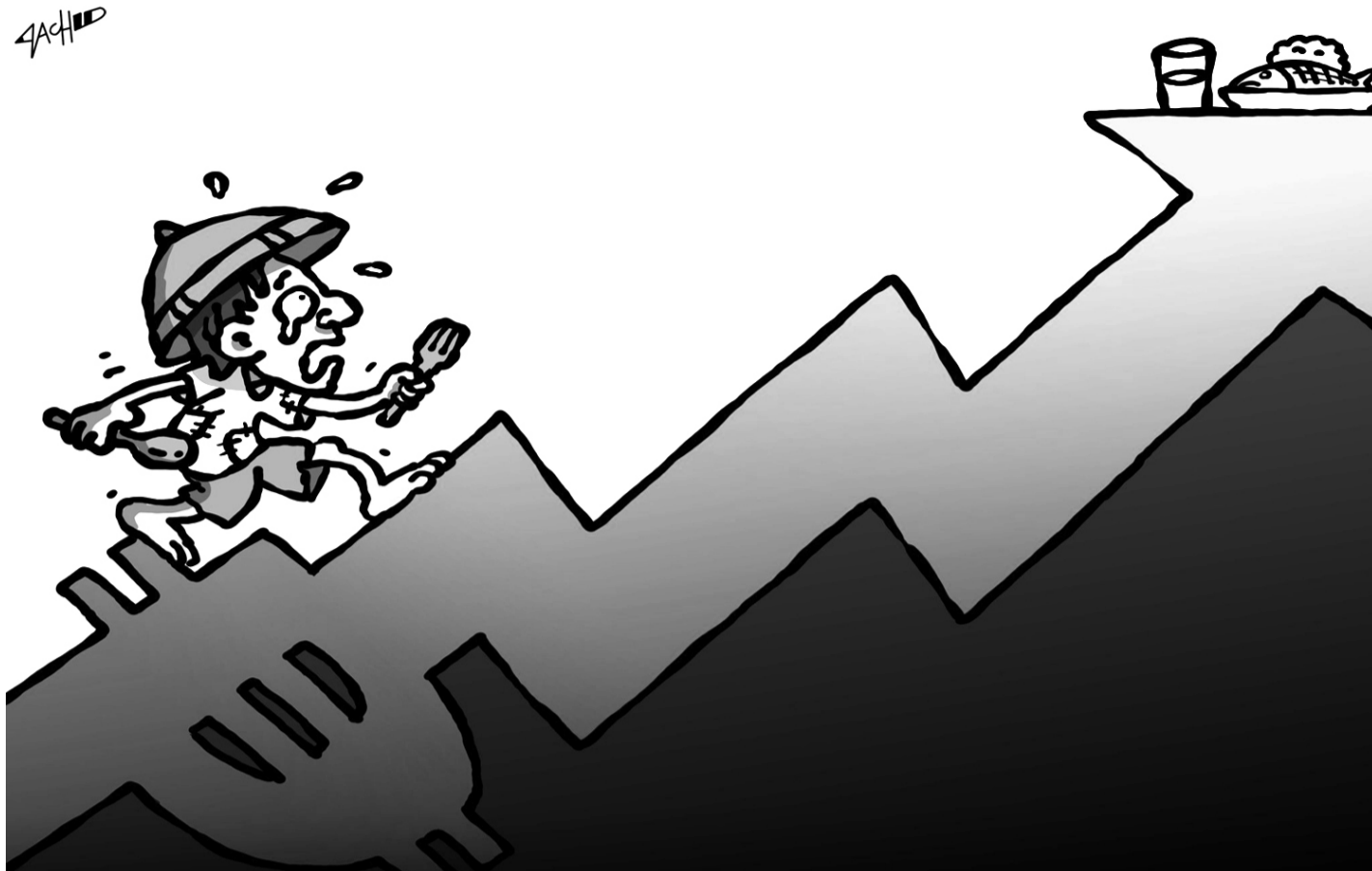
With the founding of the BUC, IRD became the centerpiece, pushed forward with constancy by Archbishop Capalla. His friendship with Muslim leaders of the Ulama League of the Philippines in Iligan, Marawi, and Davao, helped greatly. He advised me to express key ideas of IRD in BUC Final Statements, such as, mutual respect and understanding, appreciating differences of beliefs, accepting commonalities, developing convergent points such as the person of Mary or Maryam, faith that does justice, the contribution of various religious traditions to a just and lasting peace in Mindanao. These ideas were worked out in BUC discussions and workshops.

As the principal moderator of BUC general gatherings, Abp. Nanding skillfully guided the discussions, giving everyone the opportunity to make a contribution. The process was participatory, the result a consensus. The inter-religious gathering of leaders of different religious traditions was, indeed, an example of the participatory process. Because of this process, the environment in BUC meetings evolved from curiosity and lack of trust to one of mutual understanding and friendship.

Understandably, Abp. Nanding became well known as a wise practitioner of Inter-Religious Dialogue. He was elected Chairman of the CBCP Commission on Ecumenical Affairs and Inter-Religious Dialogue and, later, Chairman of its counterpart in the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. More notably, he was appointed a member of the Vatican Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue and served for many years.

Truly, Abp. Nanding's contribution to the Mindanao Church is beyond worth. I believe it was he who coined the unforgettable quote: "At the heart of peace is peace in the heart."

ZACH



Editorial

What has AI got to do with peace?

AT first blush, the message of the Holy Father for the 57th World Day of Peace that is observed every first day of the year, together with the celebration of the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, titled "Artificial Intelligence and Peace", seems off tangent. For how in the world could AI have anything to do with work for peace?

But on closer look, Pope Francis may be prophetic as he is scientific.

In a study done by the Computational Propaganda Project at Oxford University, Samantha Bradshaw and Philip N. Howard came up with a paper titled "Troops, Trolls and Troublemakers: A Global Inventory of Organized Social Media Manipulation". Among others, their study discloses that "In January 2015, the British Army announced that their 77th Brigade would 'focus on non-lethal psychological operation using social networks like Facebook and Twitter to fight enemies by gaining control of the narrative in the information age'. Their primary task of this unit is to shape public behavior through the use of 'dynamic narratives' as a counter to political propaganda disseminated by terrorist organizations."

This study is affirmed by scores more of studies the likes of Oliver Lewis Hall's "Between Digital Domination and Liberation: Digital Surveillance and Democratic Resistance" and Angel Gordo Lopez's "Social Media in Conflict: Comparing Military and

Social-Movement Technocultures", among many others.

Today, it would be sheer naivete to plot a way towards peace without in the least grappling with the givens of digital technology. In this year's peace message, Pope Francis writes, "...negative consequences of the misuse of these technologies, such as discrimination, interference in elections, the rise of a surveillance society, digital exclusion and exacerbation of an individualism increasingly disconnected from society. All these factors risk fueling conflicts and hindering peace."

Moreover, he says, "In these days, as we look at the world around us, there can be no escaping serious ethical questions related to the armaments sector. The ability to conduct military operations through remote control systems has led to a lessened perception of the devastation caused by those weapon systems and the burden of responsibility for their use, resulting in an even more cold and detached approach to the immense tragedy of war. Research on emerging technologies in the area of so-called Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems, including the weaponization of artificial intelligence, is a cause for grave ethical concern. Autonomous weapon systems can never be morally responsible subjects."

Artificial Intelligence together with the whole gamut of digital technology

is still developing and very much volatile. In fact, there is yet no single definition of AI in the world of science and technology, to date. "For the impact of any artificial intelligence device—regardless of its underlying technology—depends not only on its technical design, but also on the arms and interests of its owners, and on the situations in which it will be employed, so goes the Peace Message.

Against this backdrop, Pope Francis poses: "What will be the consequences, in the medium and long term, of these new digital technologies? And what impact will they have on individual lives and on societies, on international stability and peace?" Between the promises and risks of AI, is there still a way for the world to turn "swords into ploughshares"?

At the end of the day, one can only pray with the Holy Father "that the rapid development of forms of artificial intelligence will not increase cases of inequality and injustice all too present in today's world, but will help put an end to wars and conflicts, and alleviate many forms of suffering that afflict our human family. May Christian believers, followers of various religions and men and women of good will work together in harmony to embrace the opportunities and confront the challenges posed by the digital revolution and thus hand on to future generations a world of greater solidarity, justice and peace."



IN THE FENCE OF HOPE

BISHOP GERARDO A. ALMINAZA

New year, new hopes in the climate fight

GREETINGS, dear readers. Allow me to take this first issue of the CBCP Monitor for the year as an opportunity to wish you a blessed and meaningful beginning to 2024. The past year was no less than a roller coaster of hopes and despair for humanity the world over. It is no accident that we are given a new chapter in our lives to make the most of, and to serve one another as we serve our Creator.

At this time, I ask that we bring our attention to what was perhaps a most pivotal end to 2023: the United Nations climate change conference held in Dubai, UAE, in December last year. Entrusted to represent the National Laudato Si' Program of the CBCP, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to be part of it.

Each year in the last three decades, global leaders and representatives of communities, civil society groups, and various sectors come together to find solutions to what we now finally understand to be an existential threat to humankind: the climate crisis. Last year saw the biggest number of delegates to the climate talks of over 80,000. We may not know what the reason of each individual was for being there, but the great interest that COP 28 received is telling of an intensifying understanding

that the stakes have never been higher. 2023 was the warmest year ever recorded. Latest climate science—with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's 6th assessment report having culminated earlier in the year—sounded the alarm that the earth is truly nearing the point of no return in the warming of its atmosphere, and that continued inaction, especially of the most responsible, is condemning vulnerable peoples to unimaginable destruction.

Such was the situation prior to COP 28, that even our beloved Pope Francis sought to be part of the chaotic debates and discussions in Dubai. While ailing health prevented him from delivering his message in person, the Pope's wise words still reached global leaders and millions around the world. In a statement, Pope Francis issued a cry for action: "The drive to produce and possess," he said, "has become an obsession, resulting in an inordinate greed that has made the environment the object of unbridled exploitation. The climate, run amok, is crying out to us to halt this illusion of omnipotence..."

"May this COP prove to be a turning point, demonstrating a clear and tangible political will that can lead to a decisive

acceleration of ecological transition through means [that are] efficient, obligatory and readily monitored...and achieved in four sectors: energy efficiency; renewable sources; the elimination of fossil fuels; and education in lifestyles that are less dependent on the latter."

And what has come of the climate talks? How I wish it is fully good news that we can bring back home, but we must have courage to call a spade a spade, to have "lucidity and honesty," as Pope Francis advised in *Laudate Deum*, in understanding our dire state of affairs. Ultimately, COP 28 fell far short of the decisive commitments needed to have been delivered by world leaders to keep in line with the 1.5°C goal in regard to the sectors described above—especially on ending the age of fossil fuels. While the COP decision text on the Global Stocktake features the first time ever acknowledgement of the role of fossil fuels in causing climate change, there remains no binding commitment to fully phase out the use of coal, gas or oil, and to stop their expansion at all fronts in line with a just and timely transition. At the same time, while a Loss and Damage Fund was agreed upon on the first day,

In the fence of hope / A6

CBCP

Monitor

PROTAGONIST OF TRUTH, PROMOTER OF PEACE

The CBCP Monitor is published fortnightly by the CBCP Media Office with editorial and business offices at 3rd Floor, CBCP Compound, 470 General Luna Street, Intramuros, Manila.

Email Address: info@cbcnews.net,
Business: +63 977 062 9090 ISSN 1908-2940.

Pedro Quitaro
Editor-in-Chief

Most Rev Marcelino Antonio Maralit, D.D.
Editorial Consultant

Roy Lagarde Associate Editor
Felipe Salvosa II Editor at Large

Dennis Dayao Managing Editor
Niceforo Balbedina III Features Editor

April Frances Ortigas Design Artist
Christian Costuya Tech Support

Mercedita Juanite Circulation Manager
Marcelita Dominguez Comptroller



BY THE ROADSIDE

MSGR. EUTQUIO BELIZAR, JR. SThD

"If you wish to enter into life, obey the commandments.' He asked, 'Which?' Jesus replied, 'You shall not kill...'" (Mt 19:17-18).

"Respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life! Only in this direction will you find justice, development, true freedom, peace and happiness" (St. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 5).

A VOICE Howling in the Wilderness. That is how the cause of life and peace seems to me in this day and age of technological sophistication. The two ongoing wars between Russia and Ukraine and that between Israel and Hamas, with all parties scarcely heeding calls to cease all hostilities portray to all and sundry a grim picture. It stands out. It is called the wilderness of human inhumanity and hard-heartedness. Ironically the calls that protest the growing human carnage wrought by the ongoing internecine conflicts reflect the sentiments of the majority of nations. Yet they have also become the lonely and largely ignored voice. In the middle of it is the Church's. The latter's voice could be lonelier because she speaks and stands up for life from the womb to the tomb. Most humans fix their eyes on life in between. Even their progress is agonizingly, harrowingly slow.

Global Appears Local. One of the painful realities in the Philippines is her own terrible record of disrespect for human life. Isayterrible because, despite external trappings of Christianity, killings in the country, while largely taken for granted, are almost a daily occurrence. One only has to notice sleek or blurry footages on CCTV cameras that are being replayed by the news media of people being shot to death by riding-in-tandem killers who almost always get away unpunished. Murders with "impunity" has been, for all intents and purposes, the order of the day. From 2016 to 2018 extrajudicial killings amounted to more than 5,050 according to police statistics. Human rights groups and independent media estimate these killings to be at least 20,000 or 30,000 or more. Too much blood shed for too flimsy causes or excuses with too little accountability could describe a significant piece of the Philippine sitz-

Sanctity of human life, anyone?

im-leben. And there is no telling when or whether or not it will end.

Tomb in the Womb. Since it is a Church's concern we have to include another angle—that of the unborn. According to some studies about deaths through abortions, it is estimated that 27 out of 1,000 women with unwanted pregnancies have abortions under clandestine circumstances. Since it is extremely difficult to know the exact number of abortions in the Philippines every year, we can only imagine, in our present population of around 120 or so million, what the possible number of those who have recourse to clandestine abortions actually is. Calls to legalize abortion cite stopping the said practice as one of the reasons behind their cause. In a word, they do not mind terminating human life, no matter that it is of a defenseless human fetus, as long as it is legal. The womb to them could also be a legitimate tomb for an unwanted human life.

Muddled Yardstick of Judging. Many groups consider the above realities from perspectives and language as diverse as their interests or objectives. Some judge the killings or deaths in terms of numbers or of law or of whether abortions were safe or unsafe. It is rare for people outside of the Church to think of "moral standards" when considering the many instances of disrespect for human life in the Philippines. There are incidences in which these deaths are considered in terms of whether they served a drug-war-related goal or a-crime-or-insurgency angle. People seldom ask whether it is right to kill people—at all.

Human Life as Consecrated. I was struck by how the book of Judges and the Gospel of Luke tell us the story of two lives, actually two boys who became famous human beings—Samson and John the Baptist (Jgs 13:7; Lk 1:13-15). It is remarkable that even in the womb of their mothers they were already consecrated to God. We can be sure that a reference like this is made to underscore their importance in the history of salvation. On the other hand, it also brings home the point that human life is sacred and thus to be cherished and protected. If the parents of Samson and John the Baptist ever considered

them unwanted because, for instance, having children meant less leisure and more sacrifices, that would not have made the sanctity of their lives any less. The sanctity of life is due not to human evaluation but to its author and source, who is God.

A Saint's Voice. St John Paul II, in his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life) makes affirmations, particularly in nn. 53-54, worth pondering, repeating and upholding. They include the following:

(a) Human life is sacred because it involves the creative action of God from beginning to its end (n. 53). That is to say, God does not cease being involved in our life and in every human being's life. No human has any right to interfere in God's ongoing creative act in human life and anyone who does so plays God. He tramples underfoot the truth about himself. He is no Creator; he is a creature.

(b) The commandment "You shall not kill" (Ex 20:13; Dt 5:17) is a divine commandment which affirms that God is the "absolute Lord" of life. Absolute lordship over human life in particular simply means that, since only God authored human life, only God then may decide and act on putting it to an end. There are, of course, exceptions but exceptions do not make void God's absolute lordship over human life.

(c) No one has the right to destroy the life specifically of an innocent human being. This follows from God's absolute lordship over it. It also precludes and contradicts any claim by any one, whether an individual, group or institution, to any or exclusive authority to uphold or end human life.

(d) While the Holy Father asserts that God "does not delight in the death of the living (Wis 1:13)", he also points out who has the biggest laugh when it happens: "Only Satan can delight therein: for through his envy death entered the world (Wis 2:24)". If God is the Living God and the God of Life and the living, only the prince of death does and always will celebrate human killings and murders. It is useful to know which side we are favoring or serving by the attitudes to life we tend to adopt.

(e) Rather than see the commandment

By the roadside / A6



FAITH JOURNEY

SR. PINKY BARRIENTOS, FSP

Random thoughts on the new year

THE New year always brings with it a lot of expectations from most of us. We want that all the best happen to us, all our hopes met, our dreams realized. And so we make resolutions, promising to do better this year, to leave behind practices and attitudes that do not inspire and generate life. Instead, to embrace what is nurturing and life-fulfilling.

I heard a friend wondering aloud why the last day of the year seems to bring a certain feeling of nostalgia. I said perhaps it is because we are leaving behind something familiar and entering a year that is still unknown to us. Don't we feel a tinge of sadness in our heart when we have to part ways with someone very close to us? This is also true even with objects or life experiences that we value so much because it is associated with someone we loved or with some beautiful memories of our life. The entire year was very much a part of us. The 365 days of the year were like a canvas filled with varied strokes of life experiences, some in bright palette, others in somber hues. Colors of various shades, woven together by life experiences and decisions made, make up each page of our life story. At the end of each year, we turn a page to begin another.

Positive experiences and fulfilled life goals will forever be treasured in our happy memory album and the not-so-happy memories tucked in the realm of our subconscious, only to surface now and then as a reminder of what has been. Nonetheless, we look at the past with gratitude in our hearts, strengthened by adversities that came our way.

Although it has always been a practice that resolutions are made at the start of the new year to guide and spur us on through the year ahead of us, I believe that its success lies on the person's consistently renewing it daily. Human as we are, we tend to let go when things don't turn out the way we expect it. Prayer and perseverance are the keys. Whether the resolutions concern a personal or others' well-being, success in relationships, social or material endeavors, it is vital that there is a daily commitment on our part to work for its realization. We do our part and God will take care of the rest.

Life is a journey towards eternity. As we travel along life's paths, we encounter people who become part of our existence, fellow pilgrims whose life stories become intermingled with our own. Some may have only appeared on a few pages of our life story, some may have a chapter or more. Nevertheless, whether their stories are short or long, their being part of our life story was never coincidental.

Two of these fellow pilgrims have already reached their destination and have joined the Creator just recently, and I would like to pay tribute to them by mentioning them here.

We have lost two shepherds in a span of four days in this first month of the year. Bishop Ronald (Bong) Lunas passed on January 2, followed by Archbishop Fernando Capalla on January 6.

I met Bishop Bong when he was dean of studies and professor at the Regional Major Seminary of Davao (Remase). I was in Davao from 1996 to 2000 and in charge of our media apostolate while serving as superior of our small community there. The then Fr. Bong invited me to lecture on social communications at

Faith journey / A6



TIME OUT WITH DOC JOE

JOSE S. YAMAMOTO, M.D.

THE fondest memories of the Christmas holidays we celebrate year after year are the fun activities, the lovely surprises and gifts from loved ones, friends, relatives, and associates, and the heartfelt greetings from everyone we meet, even from complete strangers, and of course, the food! There are many occasions during the holiday season to enjoy food, often to the point of excess. We instinctively turn off the diet button and reserve the post-holiday period for getting back to our health plans.

Many New Year resolutions revolve around renewed commitments to good health, starting with dieting, consistent exercise, more attention to medical check-ups, and even enrollment in wellness programs and exercise gyms. Many of these resolutions fail because many forget that the key to success is delivering on the promises and working on the plan daily.

Unaddressed toxicity is a cause of many major health concerns. We fail to recognize that most of the toxicities we suffer from come from the food that we gorge ourselves on, especially during holiday seasons. Many of the foods served at holiday activities carry a big load of processed meats, highly refined sugar and carbohydrates, and plenty of unhealthy trans fat (oxidized fat and oils).

The cost of allowing our body and brain to be systematically poisoned by everyday toxins is huge—increased risks of disease, deteriorating quality of life, increased medical costs, loss of cognitive function, and many more. While our body system is equipped with innate detoxication

organs to handle the greater part of the toxicity load, we need to make sure that our defense systems are not overwhelmed. Every cell in the human body has a detox process and our body functions holistically to be efficient at detoxification. The organs involved in the overall detoxication processes are the intestines, the liver, kidneys, lungs and the skin.

Because our body is "detoxifying" continually, the best strategy starts with avoidance of the toxins. Limiting exposure to toxins is the logical way to proceed. Avoidance refers to minimizing exposure to toxic chemicals and heavy metals in food, water, medicine, personal care products, home-cleaning products, gardening products, pet-care products and yes, the very air we breathe. Everything we touch, inhale or consume becomes a part of our physical body by contact or absorption. Hence putting safety nets in terms of exposure is always good strategy.

To simplify our understanding, we can outline the basic steps as:

1. Identification - Identify the sources of our exposure to toxic substances
2. Avoidance - Avoid those substances by reforming our behavior, lifestyle and consumption choices to break the cycle of repeated exposure to toxins.
3. Support our body's natural detoxification and elimination abilities

Identification

We have to understand the sources

After the holidays

of toxic chemicals and heavy metals that negatively impact on health and brain function. We must evaluate and review the labels and content of every manufactured product, especially food, medicines and supplements as these might contain chemicals deleterious to one's health. This is not an easy step at all since it will take a lot of reading and familiarization to achieve a certain comfort level in making an assessment of what we put into our bodies.

Avoidance

The next step is avoidance. We need to make changes in our behavioral and consumption patterns to avoid purchasing or consuming these products. On top of the list are processed foods that are made 'tasty' by adding more salts, and refined carbohydrates. A good example is the high fructose corn syrup that sweetens almost all sodas and drinks, and a host of other products. Next are the trans fat that is denatured by being oxidized either by overheated cooking or artificially altering liquid cooking oils to make solid forms. Processed meats are also on the list for food avoidance.

Not many people are aware that the toxic chemicals in personal care products such as laundry detergents, weed killers and insect sprays, etc are notorious hormone disruptors. Hormone disruptors affect both men and women. For men, these chemicals can affect fertility by promoting feminizing effects. For women, these toxic chemicals show increased

Time out with Doc Joe / A6



THE SPIRIT OF THE LAW

FR. ELIAS "ELI" L. AYUBAN, JR., CMF

Some takeaways from *Fiducia supplicans*

WHILE doing further studies in Rome in the early 2000s, I used to celebrate Sunday Masses for a Filipino community in the chapel of our general curia. One time, the parents of a newly civilly-wed young couple approached me as I was standing at the main entrance waiting for the procession to begin. They asked me if I could bless their son and daughter during the Eucharistic celebration. Without my prior knowledge, the pair was already seated in the front row with the wife—now pregnant—donning a wedding gown. The parents assured me that it was only a matter of time before the couple would celebrate the sacrament of matrimony in their hometown in the Philippines. In the meantime, they longed to be blessed by a priest.

The situation was a little awkward and somehow put me on the spot. I was caught in a dilemma. If I would do the blessing in the context of the Mass, I might be giving the impression that I tacitly endorsed their otherwise "irregular marital situation" for such a blessing could be construed as a liturgical one proper for a church wedding. On the other hand, if I would deny their request (I was even mulling over the idea of asking them to move to the back lest they would become the center of attention during the liturgy), I would potentially embarrass them before their relatives and friends. Both the parents and the couple were active members of this community who made the petition presumably in good faith.

After weighing things, I allowed them to keep their seats. However, I explained to the parents and the couple in private and, later on, to all those who were present, that the requested blessing would be done after the Mass and should not be understood in any way as similar to a marriage blessing. The compromise seemed to work well and the occasion became a learning experience for me and the members of the community. That happened long before the Declaration *Fiducia supplicans* (FS) came out.

The document that emanated from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF) and approved by Pope Francis, released on Dec. 18, 2023, gives us a practical guide on how to respond to a similar occurrence as civil marriages are among these irregular situations contemplated in FS. Among others, it reminds us that such a blessing should not be performed "with any clothing, gestures, or words that are proper to a wedding" (n. 39). It also confirms my earlier

The spirit of the law / A6

Bishop Caermare is new head of Church's laity body



Bishop Severo Caermare of Dipolog, the new chairman of the CBCP Episcopal Commission on the Laity. NIKKO BALBEDINA

BISHOP Severo Caermare of Dipolog has assumed the leadership role in a Church body that takes charge of the apostolate of the laity.

The 54-year old took over the chairmanship of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines - Episcopal Commission on the Laity (ECLA) from the late Bishop Enrique Macaraeg of Tarlac.

Macaraeg was serving his first term as ECLA head when he succumbed to cardiac arrest in October.

The head of CBCP commissions is elected for a two-year term and can be reelected for up to three terms.

Prior to his new post, Caermare was already the vice chairman of ECLA.

The CBCP set up the ECLA in 1950, made up of a bishop chairman and four other member-bishops.

In order to facilitate the work of the commission, the various

national lay groups and diocesan councils of the laity were organized in 1957 into the Sangguniang Laikong Pilipinas or Council of the Laity in the Philippines.

The organization is governed by a 15-member board, elected by the members during a national convention held every two years.

Currently, there are 54 national Catholic lay organizations and 62 diocesan councils who are members of Laiko.

As lay arm of the CBCP, Laiko also seeks to implement the Church's programs among the lay groups while it also engages in its own advocacies and programs for lay Catholics. (CBCP News)

Quiapo priest reveals state of centuries-old Black Nazarene statue



The image of the Black Nazarene was transferred to the Quiro Grandstand on Jan. 6 in preparation for its annual procession to the Quiapo Church on Jan. 9, 2024. CBCP NEWS

MANILA has once again braced for the return of the anticipated "Traslacion" of the Black Nazarene, known as one of the world's fervent displays of Catholic faith.

Hundreds of thousands of barefoot devotees flocked the streets on Jan. 9 for the traditional procession of the four centuries-old wooden statue of the Black Nazarene.

Known for its miracles, the depiction of Christ's suffering as he carries the cross to Calvary is one of the most popular devotion in Asia's most Catholic nation.

For the first time in Traslacion's history, devotees witnessed the image in a glass case for protection against damage. However, a portion of the Nazarene's cross was left open for devotees to touch.

Fr. Rufino "Jun" Sescon, the rector of Quiapo Church, said that the image's fragility was one of the reasons behind their decision to enclose it in a laminated tempered glass case, along with banning the climbing of the andas.

"Since it is already very old, we cannot predict what could happen if an extraordinary impact happens. It could lead to something worse," Sescon said.

Since the 1990s, the original body of the image has been used in the procession, accompanied by a replica head and hands.

The original head, which already has a crack, and the cross are currently placed on the altar of Quiapo Church, while the original hands have been kept since they were destroyed.

"When the priest (at that time) saw that there were cracks in the head of the image, they decided to separate the parts," Sescon said.

The priest revealed that the original body has already developed cracks due to the annual procession, where some devotees attempt to touch or grab hold of the image atop the andas (carriage).

"Through the years, the original body is the one we have been using so it has really sustained some cracks coming from those grabbing it," he said.

Sescon said that if the condition of the original image is put in further danger, one option would be to use a replica for future processions.

"The Quiapo Church is considering that in the future, if the condition of the original image will be put in further danger, of course, we have to prioritize the care for the image," the rector said.

"The idea is to gather all the original parts in the church. A replica will, then, be used in the procession. Even the Hijos del Nazareno agree with the idea because they want to protect the image," he added.

Based on historical accounts, the image of the black Christ was brought to the Philippines by the Order of Augustinian Recollects (OAR) in 1606.

On the other hand, the annual Traslacion is believed to have begun sometime between 1767 and 1787 as a reenactment of the image's transfer to the Quiapo Church from Intramuros.

The procession has been suspended for the past three consecutive years, from 2021 to 2023, due to Covid-19 restrictions. (CBCP News)

In the fence of hope / A4

its true impact remains hollow as countries responsible for climate damage failed to deliver financing commitments at par to what they owe to most vulnerable nations. As such, reparation and justice remain elusive in the climate battle.

Even still, we need not wallow in despair. Insufficient as the language may have been, the COP decision's call for a transition away from fossil fuels is a victory by communities, civil society, leaders, and many others—including communities of the faithful who prayed and sought it in and out of COP 28—that is truly worth celebrating. It would not have been possible without the solidarity that peoples across the world delivered. This must be

an abundant source of hope as we begin a new year in the climate fight.

And now, armed with learnings from last year, the work begins for us again. Brothers and sisters, allow me to invite you to seize all opportunities to take part in averting a more catastrophic climate future for us all, but especially for the poorest and most vulnerable. It may be through opportunities we find to live more sustainable lives from the comforts of our own home, according to capacities we are able to commit.

But let us strive to go further, understanding that with the ticking clock of climate action, "the most effective solutions will not come from

individual efforts alone, but above all from major political decisions on the national and international level" (Laudate Deum, 69). As such, as early as now, let us join together and engage our stakeholders, our own leaders in government, and even all other global leaders for the task at hand of keeping the 1.5°C goal, ending fossil fuels in a just transition, protecting people and nature, and achieving climate justice and action.

Every second we dally in all these is a second borrowed—or, in fact, robbed—from the youth of today and generations yet to come to fight their own fight of climate survival and of bringing back health to our ailing Common Home. May we all be filled with renewed hope!

Faith journey / A5

the seminary, which I did for three semesters until I was transferred to another assignment. I truly treasured that experience. I did not only share with the seminarians whatever little knowledge and experience I had, I also learned a lot from them.

Archbishop Fernando Capalla was the archbishop when I was assigned in Davao. He was well-loved by the people there. I believe it was also true with the other dioceses where he had served previously. I have many good memories of Archbishop Capalla as a friend and shepherd. A peacemaker and an advocate of justice, he was simple, humble and approachable, very unassuming in many ways but so full of wisdom. In the conversations we have had, his sense of justice and respect for the person was very evident. He told me once that, "one unchristian thing we can do to another is to regard the other

person as if he/she doesn't exist." That piece of wisdom has remained with me ever since as a reminder to always treat another person with respect, whoever he/she is.

He used to come to the convent and whenever he was home and had time, would always say yes to an invitation for dinner at the convent. I could not forget one particular occasion when our General Councilor came for a fraternal visit. As a protocol, whenever there is a fraternal visit from our higher superiors, we usually bring them to the archbishop to pay their respects. When I called up Archbishop Capalla to inform him that our General Councilor was in town for a fraternal visit to the community, and asked if I could bring her over to greet him, he said to me at once: "why not I go instead to your place and have dinner there, instead of coming here?" I was

delighted to hear him say that because the community was also happy to have him around. Needless to say, it was a dinner that was immensely enjoyed by everyone. Archbishop Capalla was very fond of the song "Fernando" by Abba. It came up during conversation at the table that our General Councilor, who was from Brazil, also knew the song. So we ended up singing the song to the delight of the archbishop, who also sang with us.

Bishop Lunas and Archbishop Capalla truly were shepherds after the Lord's heart. And I am so blessed to have them grace the pages of my life. The words of the apostle Paul to Timothy are a fitting tribute to them who lived their life only for the Lord and his flock. "I know him in whom I have believed, and I am confident that he is able to guard what has been entrusted to me until that day." (2 Tim. 1:12)

Time out with Doc Joe / A5

incidence of malignancies, especially breast and ovarian cancers.

Support

Environmentalists often quote that 'dilution' is the remedy for pollution. In other words, elimination of water-soluble toxins is less effective if one is dehydrated. So drinking plenty of pure clean water is the first start. This can be a problem for one who has pre-existing kidney problems, so be sure to consult with your kidney specialist before embarking of a hydration program.

Physical movement is also important for circulating lymph which allows the body to expel metabolic garbage more efficiently.

Sweating with exercise or sauna is beneficial in eliminating toxins through the skin.

It is a smart step to ensure support for our detox organs (liver, kidneys, skin, and digestive system) by adding medicinal herbs, superfoods, and dietary strategies to any health plan. Supporting our detox systems require boosting our intake of nutritive elements. People living in modern societies chronically lack vitamin D, zinc, selenium, magnesium and other vitamins especially water-soluble vitamins such as B complex and vitamin C.

Nowadays, because of media propagation, what is in vogue are the so-called detoxification (detox) programs. By and large, detoxification is important;

however, it is not a one-time affair but one that must be done regularly. For this to happen, there are a few basic lessons to be learned and commit to memory. While there is value in such detox procedures as IV glutathione, vitamin infusions, infrared saunas, and colon cleansing, it is good to be reminded that these should be administered by qualified and trained health professionals.

Indulging in unhealthy foods and toxic situations is not a very good way to honor our bodies, the temple of the Holy Spirit. The best way to celebrate the birth of our Lord, and the salvation He brought to the world, is gratitude, prayer, contemplation, and radiating the love He freely gives to us to others.

By the roadside / A5

negatively, St John Paul II reminds us that it actually leads to a "promotion of life and to progress along the way of a love that gives, receives and serves" [EV 54]. Of course, that is the journey of a thousand miles. But it begins in that single step of heeding Ex 20:13 and Dt 5:17's command: "You shall not kill".

Rare But Real. I once watched a documentary of a kindly woman who helped a pregnant teenager avoid abortion by taking care of

her and promising to adopt her baby once born. After many years her baby became a very successful young man who sought and found her (the biological mother). Contrary to her fears, he did not blame her. Instead he thanked her for choosing to give him a chance at life in a ready and loving family environment. Many times, the abortion option is called "pro-choice". The first victim of this monicker is the truth. For how can the pro-abortion option be

called "pro-choice" without, at the same time, admitting that a murderer could be seen as someone who exercised a "pro-choice" conviction? To call a spade a spade by admitting to an anti-life bias in the "pro-abortion" camp is a service to truth. The real choice is between human life or human death. Standing for human life is the harder choice but it is the choice for God, for human dignity and for peace of conscience.

The spirit of the law / A5

understanding that it should not be perceived as a support for those living in an irregular situation (n. 40).

The Declaration, however, is received differently and is open to misinterpretations. On the one hand, mainstream media, like CNN, hail it as a historic shift in the Catholic doctrine on marriage. But it is not only the secular world that somehow politicizes *FS*. A prominent priest, for example, talks openly about the same-sex couples that he intends to bless. In one of his posts, he writes, "As a priest, I look forward to blessing same-sex couples, sharing with them the graces that God desires for everyone, something I've waited years to do." Then he shares photos of these couples on his FB wall. I do not think *FS* wants to go this far.

On the other hand, *FS* has also evoked disagreements even from among the ranks of the pastors of the Church. Some episcopal conferences and individual bishops have openly criticized the document and have vowed not to follow it in their respective local churches. Among others, they find the heading of Section III confusing, namely: *Blessings of Couples in Irregular Situations and of Couples of the Same Sex*. They argue that the use of the word "couples" could be construed as legitimizing the union, notwithstanding the clarification put forward by the DDF to the contrary.

Without a doubt, the blessing of individuals in same-sex unions is likewise pastorally challenging in over 70 countries that criminalize gay relationships. There are even laws that condemn the mere act of declaring oneself as homosexual. Any blessing of these individuals, even a pastoral one, is imprudent and may expose not only the couples, but also the ministers, to risk. It is not surprising then that many African bishops have openly voiced out

their opposition to the document, not solely on perceived doctrinal grounds, but also due to its cultural and legal implications.

The Church's position on the doctrine of marriage, however, has remained firm as can be seen in its 2021 *responsum* and the Pope's response to the *dubium* of two Cardinals affirming that "the blessing of homosexual unions cannot be considered licit". *FS*, on its part, maintains that it does not overrule or set aside the *responsum* (n. 11). Added to that is the clarification made by the DDF on Jan. 4, 2024, reiterating that marriage is the "exclusive, stable, and indissoluble union between a man and a woman, naturally open to the generation of children and what contradicts it are inadmissible".

Thus, the advice of *FS* that blessings should not necessarily become the norm, but entrusted to "a practical discernment in particular circumstances" (n. 37) can help us in our judgment as ordained ministers. Its practical application can vary from one context to another taking into consideration the culture and the existing civil laws.

Going back to my earlier story, several years after my studies, I returned to Rome and I had the opportunity meet again the couple, now married in the Church and blessed with two children. The elder child was the baby the pregnant mother carried in her womb when I blessed her. It suddenly dawned on me that I did not only bless the mother but also the baby. Or, better still, God blessed them albeit the "irregularity of their situation" and my unworthiness.

Was it St. Teresa of Avila who said, "God can write straight with crooked lines?"

Padre Pio nat'l shrine in Batangas aspires for international status



Devotees venerate a relic of Saint Padre Pio at his national shrine in Sto. Tomas Batangas on Jan. 13, 2024. CBCP NEWS

A NATIONAL shrine dedicated to Saint Padre Pio in Batangas province, south of Manila, is aspiring to attain international stature, according to a new book.

The book released Jan. 13 is titled "Enlarging the Space of our Tent," and published by the Archdiocese of Lipa.

It stated that a concrete manifestation of the archdiocese's efforts "to enlarge its tent" is the Parish and National Shrine of Saint Padre Pio located in Sto. Tomas town.

"This dream reflects the archdiocese's desire to extend its influence far beyond

its local and immediate surroundings and welcome people of diverse cultures and nationalities to experience the spiritual richness it offers," part of the book read.

The shrine, it added, "seeks to serve as a beacon of unity, drawing followers from far and wide to participate in its solemn religious ceremonies of worship and healing, and share in the collective faith journey."

Since the establishment of the parish in 2003, the declaration of the church as an archdiocesan shrine in 2008, and its recognition as a national shrine in 2015, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims have come to this place to seek blessings from God through the intercession of St. Padre Pio.

The shrine also houses several first-class relics of the Italian saint, who spent most

of his life in a monastery in southern Italy.

Known for his stigmata and gift of healing, Padre Pio is one of the most revered saints of the 20th century.

When his heart relic was brought to the shrine in 2018, hundreds of thousands of people trooped to the place of worship to pay homage to the saint.

Designation of an international shrine is approved by the Vatican as a sacred place for divine worship for the universal Church.

The country currently has one international shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage, located in Antipolo City.

Its new status will be formally conferred during a Mass to be presided over by Archbishop Charles Brown, the Apostolic Nuncio to the Philippines, on Jan. 26. (CBCP News)

San Carlos diocese opposes copper mining project in Negros Occidental

AS a mining company is digging its way into the hills of Negros Occidental province, local Catholic leaders are fighting to halt the multimillion peso project.

The Diocese of San Carlos' concerns regarding the chalcocite copper mining project in the city of Sagay's Loje Jaena village include threats of environmental and health hazards.

"We express deep concern over Tambuli Mining Company Inc.'s failure to address vital issues raised, particularly the potential impacts on soil, air, water, and the overall community well-being," the diocese said in a statement.

The collective statement was signed by Bishop Gerardo Alminaza; Fr. Julius Tormis, director of the diocese's Ecology Ministry; Fr. Joferson Garces, the Diocesan Social

Action Center director.

They said the project's proximity to Tan-ao River and Himogaan River is a major concern as they are vital for fishing, vegetable gardening, irrigation, and fishponds.

The diocese also stressed that the Himogaan River is also culturally significant, hosting "Adlaw Sang Suba" and supporting tourism, irrigating sugarcane fields, and aiding coastal fishing.

These rivers discharge into the Sagay Marine Reserve, amplifying ecological concerns, they added.

"To date, the company's inability to provide satisfactory responses underscores the urgent need for a thorough examination of potential impacts on the community's natural resources," they also said. (CBCP News)

Pope Francis grants plenary indulgences on 400th anniversary of Piat Shrine

BY FELIPE SALVOSA II

PILGRIMS to the centuries-old Our Lady of Piat will mark the 400th anniversary of the miraculous image's shrine in Cagayan Valley with plenary indulgences from Pope Francis.

The Apostolic Penitentiary, through a "most special faculty" from the pope, released the decree on the grant of plenary indulgences on Dec. 5, upon the request of Archbishop Ricardo Baccay of Tuguegarao.

The Piat jubilee will run from Dec. 26, 2023 to Dec. 26, 2024, according to the decree signed by the Vatican's major penitentiary, Cardinal Maurus Piacenza and Msgr. Christopher Nykiel, the regent.

Obtaining a plenary indulgence means the removal of all punishment, whether on earth or purgatory, attached to sin, according to Catholic teaching. The indulgence may be obtained once in a day.

The Vatican decree grants

the plenary indulgence "subject to the usual conditions - sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion and prayer for the intentions of the Holy Father"

It may be obtained by "all the faithful who are truly penitent and impelled by charity, as well as to the souls of the faithful in Purgatory by way of suffrages, if the faithful make a pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Piat either individually or in groups, or if they spend some time in pious contemplation before an image of Our Lady of Piat publicly exposed for veneration, concluding with the recitation of the Lord's Prayer, the Creed and an invocation to the Blessed Virgin Mary."

It said the old and the sick who are confined to their homes, "may also gain the same indulgence, where there is repentance of sin with the intention of fulfilling at the first possible opportunity the three conditions, if they join themselves spiritually to the celebrations in honor of the



The Minor Basilica of Our Lady of Piat in the northern province of Cagayan. PHOTO COURTESY OF FR. VICTOR EMMANUEL QUINTOS

Blessed Virgin Mary and offer their pains and sufferings in their own lives to the mercy of God."

The decree called on the rector of the Piat sanctuary and its priests to "make available the opportunity for confession with promptitude and generosity," to allow the most number of people to obtain the plenary indulgence.

The black Marian icon of Our Lady of the Rosary of the Visitation was brought to the Philippines from Macau

by Dominican missionaries in 1604 and was originally enshrined in Lal-lo, Cagayan, then the seat of the Diocese of Nueva Segovia.

Two decades later, the image found a permanent home in what is now the Shrine of Our Lady of Piat, located in the municipality of Piat in Cagayan, about 30 minutes from Tuguegarao, the provincial capital.

Declared a minor basilica in 1999, the shrine is a pilgrimage center in northeast Luzon.

Charter / A1

the bid to change or amend the Constitution will only strengthen the systems and practices of corruption," Maralit said on Jan. 12.

Bagaforo also said poverty as a result of corruption was the country's chief problem, not the provisions of the Constitution.

"Poverty will always be a problem if corruption is allowed to fester within our government," he said. "Instead of wasting time and resources on amending the Constitution, the government should prioritize measures to eradicate corruption and ensure the efficient and effective delivery of basic social services to our people."

Bishop Joel Baylon of Legazpi cast doubts on the motives of the signature drive, urging his flock to use their consciences and calling on authorities to monitor the campaign for violations of the law.

"It is a call for vigilance and discernment, urging us not to succumb to temptations of monetary gain or power, but to act with integrity and in the best interests of our community," the Diocese of Legazpi said in a Facebook post on Jan. 13.

Bishop Abet Uy of Tagbilaran called on the Boholano faithful "not to trade their signatures for charter change. An initiative claiming to represent the people, without genuine input and consultation from the community, may ultimately serve the interests of only a select few."

Also on Jan. 13, Bishop Severo Caermare of Dipolog said changes to the charter, the fundamental law of the land paid for by the "life and blood" of the struggles of Filipinos, should not be rushed.

Citing the Vatican 2 Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, Caermare reminded the faithful that the political system should be for the benefit of the majority.

"The People's Initiative that does not come from intelligent

reflection and perceived needs of the people will only lead to change in favor of only a few," he said.

'Senate to be diluted'

The first bishop to openly speak up against the latest charter change drive, Bishop Broderick Pabillo of the Apostolic Vicariate of Taytay in Palawan, warned that a constituent assembly, composed of 315 representatives and 24 senators, would vote as one body and dilute the vote of the more independent Senate.

"Tell people not to sign! This is not an initiative of the people but of some politicians," Pabillo said in a statement on Jan. 11.

The prelate also cautioned against leveraging the urgent call for a barangay assembly to push for constitutional reform.

Charter change can be done through Congress as a constituent assembly, a constitutional convention, or through a people's initiative upon a petition of at least 12% of the total number of registered voters.

Each legislative district must also be represented by at least 3% of registered voters. There are over 67 million registered voters in the Philippines.

Proponents of charter change in the House of Representatives have claimed that the amendments would only focus on the economic provisions of the Constitution, which restricts the flow of foreign capital into the country.

In theory, however, a constituent assembly can propose any amendment, including changes to the form of government.

The CBCP has repeatedly emphasized that any move for Charter change "must be in the best interest of the people and the nation."

The bishops had also long preferred the use of a constitutional convention over other methods, such as Congress acting as constituent assembly.

Synod / A1

synods was held in October 2023 in the Vatican, with 363 voting participants from around the world.

For the first time, laypeople, including 54 women, had voting rights. More than a quarter of the voting members were not bishops.

Grech said this current setup provides the Church "a space and acknowledges the beauty and richness of the holy people of God."

"It gives us a slot where we can really share with one another this beauty, this goodness that comes

from the Holy Spirit not only for my or your good but for the good of the Church and humanity," he added.

"I think synodality is not only a gift for the Church, but hopefully a gift for society at large," Grech also said.

Nazarene / A1

we should just take it as birth pains."

"One direction that we see is to use a defogger like the ones in the cars to prevent moisture build-up," he said.

"And one thing is for sure: we attribute the faster procession to the new design of the andas," Irasga added.

During the procession, one of the two 50-meter ropes used to pull the andas snapped before turning to Arlegui Street corner Quezon Boulevard in Quiapo.

Irasga said that the rope getting broken off is not new because "that has always been the experience in the past."

"It's really because some devotees pull threads from the rope and bring it to their homes," he also said.

Call to service

Presiding over the third-to-last of the 33 fiesta Masses on Tuesday evening, Quiapo Church spokesperson Fr. Hans

Magdurulang said that every devotee is called to serve and minister to others.

And serving in Christ's name, he said, means no conditions or expectations.

"Let us be devotees who not only receive but also serve," Magdurulang said.

"The Black Nazarene is not just on the altar or andas; He must also be present in our good attitude and reflected acts of kindness toward others," he said.

Caritas / A1

In a statement released January 8, 2024, Caritas Philippines urged the government to consider the well-being of small jeepney operators and drivers while implementing pollution reduction efforts.

Its president, Bishop Jose Colin Bagaforo, stressed the organization's support for modernizing the public transport system but cautioned against leaving thousands of Filipinos behind.

"We welcome the government's commitment to improve public transportation," Bagaforo said. "However, we cannot condone a modernization process that disregards the human cost."

"We urge the government to ensure a just transition that protects the livelihoods of jeepney operators and drivers, who are the backbone of our transportation

system, while also laying the groundwork for a more efficient, interconnected, and cost-effective mass transport network that benefits all," he said.

The Kidapawan bishop emphasized the need for fair compensation and livelihood support for displaced drivers, including access to retraining programs and financial assistance.

"These families are not just statistics; they are our neighbors, our brothers and sisters," he said. "We cannot let them fall through the cracks during this transition."

The national Caritas also advocated for investment in locally-developed, renewable energy-powered vehicles.

"We have brilliant Filipino engineers and entrepreneurs who are developing innovative solutions for clean

transportation," Bagaforo said. "Let's support them and create a future where our public transport is not only efficient but also sustainable."

The organization also emphasized the importance of preserving the country's heritage and creative spirit amidst modernization.

According to Bagaforo, jeepneys represent much more than a mode of transport; "they embody our rich cultural tapestry."

"We must find solutions that honor our heritage and showcase Filipino ingenuity, while simultaneously building a future-oriented public transport system that addresses the needs of a growing population," he said. (CBCP News)

Prayer / A1

"I invite you to embark on 'Pilgrimages of Prayer' this year," Advincula said in his New Year's message.

"Let every ecclesial community go back to the centrality of prayer in our life as missionary disciples of Jesus," he said.

Pope Francis has earlier announced that 2024 will be a "Year of Prayer" in preparation for the Jubilee 2025.

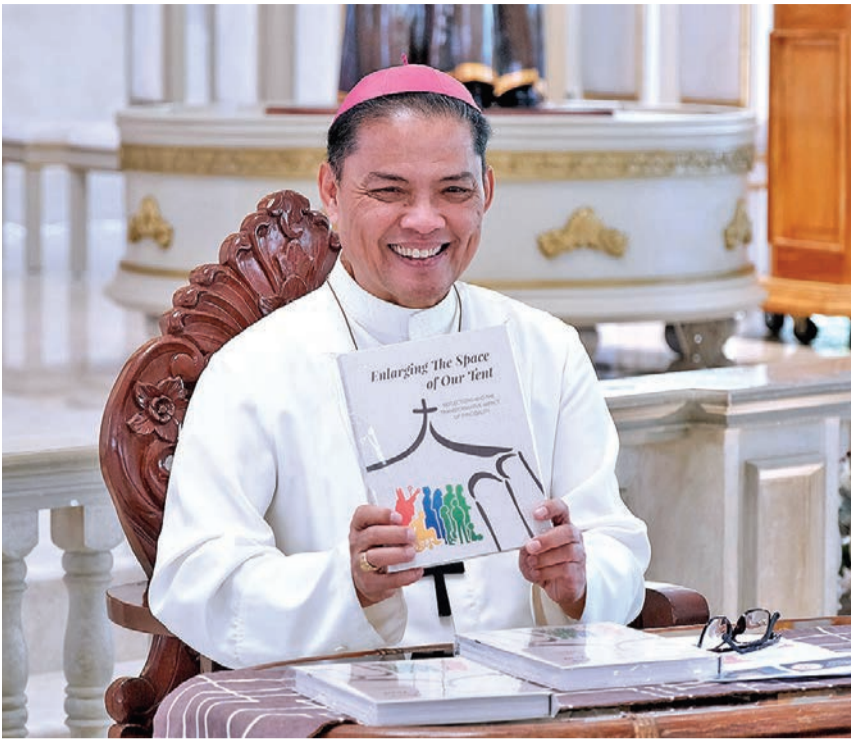
The 71-year-old Manila archbishop also urged the continuation of the 'synodal

process of walking together in communion, mission, and participation' that the archdiocese has initiated.

"Let this new year be an occasion for us to review our initiatives in gradually forming ourselves into a synodal Church...," the cardinal added.

"There will be challenges along the way. But we are always assured that He walks with us. And so, we begin our journey, with courage and faith," he also said. (CBCP News)

Lipa archdiocese launches 'synodal book'



Archbishop Gilbert Garcera of Lipa leads the book launch of "Enlarging the Space of our Tent" at the Parish and National Shrine of Saint Padre Pio in Sto. Tomas, Batangas on Jan. 13, 2024. CBCP NEWS

By ROY LAGARDE

A NEW book, featuring reflections from church people and laity across various walks of life, offers insights into the "transformative impact of synodality".

Published by the Archdiocese of Lipa, "Enlarging the Space of Our Tent" is a 271-page book inviting readers to step out of their comfort zones and engage in conversations

fostering mutual respect, support, and understanding.

It was formally launched on Saturday, Jan. 13, at the National Shrine of Saint Padre Pio in Batangas province's Santo Tomas town, south of Manila.

Archbishop Gilbert Garcera of Lipa said the book "presents an interesting perspective," bringing together the voices of some bishops, priests, farmers, young people, politicians, and even experts from abroad.

"This really is a synodal book," Garcera said during the launch. "And in this book you'll see communion and participation in response to the mission."

In the book's epilogue, the archbishop said that one of the reasons they decided to publish it is for people to "embrace a more inclusive perspective."

"They will be reminded of the richness and diversity of human experience," Garcera wrote.

Among the writers are Bishop Pablo Virgilio David and Bishop Mylo Hubert Vergara, the president and vice president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), respectively.

The two bishops were also two of the four Philippine delegates to the first session of the Synod of Bishops on Synodality at the Vatican in October 2023.

The release of the book coincided with the launch of Garcera's pastoral visits to the 66 parishes in his archdiocese, scheduled to take place from April to August this year.

Among other reasons, a bishop's pastoral visit aims to bring encouragement and hope to those engaged in pastoral work and parishioners.

Garcera, 64, has been the archbishop of one of the country's largest ecclesiastical territories since April 2017.

Bishop Lunas remembered as 'holy man for others'

BISHOP Ronald "Bong" Lunas of Pagadian was remembered as a "holy man for others" at his funeral Mass Jan. 11 in a packed Santo Niño Cathedral.

Lunas, aged 57, died on Jan. 2 due to complications from heart bypass at a government hospital in Davao City.

Archbishop Martin Jumoad of Ozamis served as the presider and homilist at the liturgy that drew droves of prelates, public officials, priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful.

He described the late bishop as "simple, down to earth, always available and ready to serve."

"Bp. Lunas has a happy disposition and I have never seen him to be angry," said Jumoad, who was immediately appointed apostolic administrator of Pagadian on Jan. 3.

The archbishop even floated the idea that his former seminary student could be a candidate for sainthood because of the way he lived his life and cared for others.

"It is possible that Bishop Lunas can be a candidate for sainthood," Jumoad said.

'Promising bishop'

Ordained a priest for the Diocese of Digos in 1992, Lunas was appointed bishop of Pagadian in November 2018.

He was ordained to the episcopate on February 11, 2019, becoming the first bishop from the clergy of the Digos diocese.

Lunas was installed as the fifth



Archbishop Martin Jumoad of Ozamis leads funeral service for Bishop Ronald Lunas of Pagadian at the Santo Niño Cathedral in Pagadian City, Jan. 11, 2024. PHOTO FROM DIOCESE OF PAGADIAN

bishop of Pagadian on March 25, 2019, and served for nearly five years.

He has been leading the Episcopal Commission on Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) of the CBCP since 2021.

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) described him as a "young and promising bishop" whose death is not only a loss for the Church in the Philippines but "for the Church in Asia too".

After the Mass, Lunas was laid to rest beside the cathedral.

Caretaker

As apostolic administrator, Jumoad serves as the caretaker for the diocese at this time of transition, addressing the pastoral needs of the faithful and keeping things in an orderly way until the new bishop is appointed.

Jumoad, who has served as Ozamis archbishop since 2016, has asked for prayers for his added duties.

"I hope you truly pray for me. Please include me in your daily prayers," he said. (CBCP News)

Pope Francis OKs coronation of Edsa image of Our Lady of Fatima

By JOSEPH RYAN MOSCOSO

POPE Francis has granted canonical coronation to the country's national pilgrim image of Our Lady of Fatima, the same icon used during the People Power Revolution of 1986.

The news was announced Dec. 19 by the National Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima in Valenzuela City, where the image is enshrined, citing a decree from the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.

"We are confident that this canonical coronation will contribute to an ever deepening devotion to the Mother of God on the part of God's holy, faithful people which will, in turn, assist them in their spiritual growth," said Archbishop Vittorio Viola, the dicastery's secretary.

A canonical coronation is a formal ceremony wherein a Marian image

is crowned in the name of the pope.

The coronation acknowledges the specific image's local significance while also recognizing its universal importance within the Catholic Church. The practice began in the 17th century but became increasingly popular in the late 1800s.

Our Lady of Fatima holds a special place in the Catholic nation as her image was at the forefront of the peaceful uprising at Edsa.

In 1999, the image was entrusted to the care of the National Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima and has been enthroned there ever since.

The pilgrim image received an episcopal coronation on May 13, 2017, marking the centenary of the Fatima apparitions.

The shrine has scheduled the rite of coronation for the image on Feb. 25, 2024, the 38th anniversary of the Edsa revolt.



Archbishop Romulo Valles of Davao presides over the funeral Mass for Archbishop Emeritus Fernando Capalla at the San Pedro Metropolitan Cathedral in Davao City, Jan. 15, 2024. SCREENSHOT FROM ARCHDIOCESE OF DAVAO/FACEBOOK

Davao bids farewell to Archbishop Capalla

THE public bid retired Archbishop Fernando Capalla a final farewell on Jan. 15 as he was laid to rest in the southern city of Davao, nine days after he died at age 89.

Hundreds of faithful packed the Davao Cathedral for the funeral service in honor of "the bishop of peace and dialogue".

His successor, Archbishop Romulo Valles, presided over the Mass, with Cardinal Orlando Quevedo, the archbishop emeritus of Cotabato, serving as the homilist.

In his homily, Quevedo said that peace and dialogue were the "hallmarks" of the life of Capalla, who served as Davao archbishop from November 1996 until his retirement in February 2012.

"The holiness of Archbishop Capalla is made up of Gospel values: mutual respect and understanding, friendships with peoples of other faith, respecting differences, and building convergence among different faiths," he said.

Capalla served as CBCP president from November 1996 to February 2012, at which time he was on the central committee of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC).

Aside from being an FABC central committee member from 2003 to 2005, he was a member of the FABC Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA) from

2000 to 2005.

In 2006, he became the chairman of the FABC OEIA until 2012.

In the CBCP, before becoming its president, he chaired the Episcopal Commission on Interreligious Dialogue and Episcopal Commission on Ecumenical Affairs.

More notably, he was appointed a member of the Vatican Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue and served for many years.

In a message, Pope Francis lauded the archbishop's "dedicated episcopal ministry, particularly his pastoral charity and commitment to promoting interreligious dialogue".

Capalla is also known as co-founder of the Bishops-Ulama Conference, an interreligious organization aimed at fostering understanding between Muslims and Christians in Mindanao.

Several church leaders from different dioceses attended the service, including Cardinal Jose Advincula of Manila and Bishop Pablo Virgilio David of Kalookan, who is also the president of the Episcopal Conference.

Some public figures were also seen at the cathedral, including former president Rodrigo Duterte and senators Christopher Lawrence "Bong" Go and Ronald Dela Rosa.

After the Mass, Capalla was laid to rest at the cathedral's "Dormitium De San Pedro". (CBCP News)

Teresian Association in PH celebrates 100 years of pontifical approval

THE Teresian Association - Philippines has joined other countries around the world where the TA is present in celebrating the 100th anniversary of its pontifical approval on Jan. 11.

The milestone was marked with a Mass presided over by Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, pro-prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization, at the Saint Pedro Poveda College in Quezon City.

"This is a great blessing not only for the association but for the whole Church," Tagle said in his homily.

He said St. Poveda envisioned the TA as contributing to the mission of the Church mainly through education and culture, "but to do it in the manner of Jesus in a humble way."

"Just these two things: attentiveness

to culture, attentiveness to the way we do our mission," Tagle added. "And let us always learn from Jesus."

Bishop Honesto Ongtioco of Cubao concelebrated the Mass with him.

The Teresian Association was founded in Spain in 1911 by Fr Pedro Poveda, who was canonized by John Paul II in 2003.

On Jan. 11, 1924, the TA was recognized by Pope Pius XI as an international lay organization with pontifical right, which allowed it to develop internationally, extending its roots to over 30 countries across the world.

The Teresian Association arrived in the Philippines in 1950 and its presence was immediately felt in different colleges and universities in the country.

It is currently present in Bacolod,

Bukidnon, Cagayan de Oro, Cebu, Davao, Iloilo, Manila, Tagaytay, and Zamboanga.

In August 2023, the TA elected Ms Gregoria Ruiz as the first Filipina president of the Teresian Association International.

"We hope that celebrating 100 years will be a good opportunity to continue looking to the future with hope and opening new paths of consolidation and evangelization," Ruiz said in a message for the occasion.

"May we boldly renew our lay vocation in the Church which is one of outreach that is synodal. It is time to open to the Spirit who is with us as we embark on an adventure of setting out, together with many people towards a new centenary," she said. (CBCP News)



Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle leads Mass to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Teresian Association's pontifical approval at Saint Pedro Poveda College in Quezon City on January 11, 2024. SAINT PEDRO POVEDA COLLEGE/FACEBOOK

DICASTERY FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH

Declaration *Fiducia Supplicans* On the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings



View of the dome of St Peter's Basilica from inside the Vatican Museum. ROY LAGARDE

Presentation

This Declaration considers several questions that have come to this Dicastery in recent years. In preparing the document, the Dicastery, as is its practice, consulted experts, undertook a careful drafting process, and discussed the text in the *Congresso* of the Doctrinal Section of the Dicastery. During that time, the document was discussed with the Holy Father. Finally, the text of the Declaration was submitted to the Holy Father for his review, and he approved it with his signature.

While the subject matter of this document was being studied, the Holy Father's response to the *Dubia* of some Cardinals was made known. That response provided important clarifications for this reflection and represents a decisive element for the work of the Dicastery. Since "the Roman Curia is primarily an instrument at the service of the successor of Peter" (Ap. Const. *Praedicate Evangelium*, II, 1), our work must foster, along with an understanding of the Church's perennial doctrine, the reception of the Holy Father's teaching.

As with the Holy Father's above-mentioned response to the *Dubia* of two Cardinals, this Declaration remains firm on the traditional doctrine of the Church about marriage, not allowing any type of liturgical rite or blessing similar to a liturgical rite that can create confusion. The value of this document, however, is that it offers a specific and innovative contribution to the pastoral meaning of blessings, permitting a broadening and enrichment of the classical understanding of blessings, which is closely linked to a liturgical perspective. Such theological reflection, based on the pastoral vision of Pope Francis, implies a real development from what has been said about blessings in the Magisterium and the official texts of the Church. This explains why this text has taken on the typology of a "Declaration."

It is precisely in this context that one can understand the possibility of blessing couples in irregular situations and same-sex couples without officially validating their status or changing in any way the Church's perennial teaching on marriage.

This Declaration is also intended as a tribute to the faithful People of God, who worship the Lord with so many gestures of deep trust in his mercy and who, with this confidence, constantly come to seek a blessing from Mother Church.

Víctor Manuel Card. Fernández
Prefect

Introduction

1. The supplicating trust of the faithful People of God receives the gift of blessing that flows from the Heart of Christ through his Church. Pope Francis offers this timely reminder: "The great blessing of God is Jesus Christ. He is the great gift of God, his own Son. He is a blessing for all humanity, a blessing that has saved us all. He is the Eternal Word, with whom the Father blessed us 'while we were still sinners' (Rom. 5:8), as St. Paul says. He is the Word made flesh, offered for us on the cross."^[1]

2. Encouraged by such a great and

consoling truth, this Dicastery has considered several questions of both a formal and an informal nature about the possibility of blessing same-sex couples and—in light of Pope Francis' fatherly and pastoral approach—of offering new clarifications on the *Responsum ad dubium*^[2] that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published on 22 February 2021.

3. The above-mentioned *Responsum* elicited numerous and varied reactions: some welcomed the clarity of the document and its consistency with the Church's perennial teaching; others did not share the negative response it gave to the question or did not consider the formulation of its answer and the reasons provided in the attached *Explanatory Note* to be sufficiently clear. To meet the latter reaction with fraternal charity, it seems opportune to take up the theme again and offer a vision that draws together the doctrinal aspects with the pastoral ones in a coherent manner because "all religious teaching ultimately has to be reflected in the teacher's way of life, which awakens the assent of the heart by its nearness, love, and witness."^[3]

I. The blessing in the sacrament of marriage

4. Pope Francis' recent response to the second of the five questions posed by two Cardinals^[4] offers an opportunity to explore this issue further, especially in its pastoral implications. It is a matter of avoiding that "something that is not marriage is being recognized as marriage."^[5] Therefore, rites and prayers that could create confusion between what constitutes marriage—which is the "exclusive, stable, and indissoluble union between a man and a woman, naturally open to the generation of children"^[6]—and what contradicts it are inadmissible. This conviction is grounded in the perennial Catholic doctrine of marriage; it is only in this context that sexual relations find their natural, proper, and fully human meaning. The Church's doctrine on this point remains firm.

5. This is also the understanding of marriage that is offered by the Gospel. For this reason, when it comes to blessings, the Church has the right and the duty to avoid any rite that might contradict this conviction or lead to confusion. Such is also the meaning of the *Responsum* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which states that the Church does not have the power to impart blessings on unions of persons of the same sex.

6. It should be emphasized that in the Rite of the Sacrament of Marriage, this concerns not just any blessing but a gesture reserved to the ordained minister. In this case, the blessing given by the ordained minister is tied directly to the specific union of a man and a woman, who establish an exclusive and indissoluble covenant by their consent. This fact allows us to highlight the risk of confusing a blessing given to any other union with the Rite that is proper to the Sacrament of Marriage.

II. The meaning of the various blessings

7. The Holy Father's above-

mentioned response invites us to broaden and enrich the meaning of blessings.

8. Blessings are among the most widespread and evolving sacramentals. Indeed, they lead us to grasp God's presence in all the events of life and remind us that, even in the use of created things, human beings are invited to seek God, to love him, and to serve him faithfully.^[7] For this reason, blessings have as their recipients: people; objects of worship and devotion; sacred images; places of life, of work, and suffering; the fruits of the earth and human toil; and all created realities that refer back to the Creator, praising and blessing him by their beauty.

The liturgical meaning of the rites of blessing

9. From a strictly liturgical point of view, a blessing requires that what is blessed be conformed to God's will, as expressed in the teachings of the Church.

10. Indeed, blessings are celebrated by virtue of faith and are ordered to the praise of God and the spiritual benefit of his people. As the *Book of Blessings* explains, "so that this intent might become more apparent, by an ancient tradition, the formulas of blessing are primarily aimed at giving glory to God for his gifts, asking for his favors, and restraining the power of evil in the world."^[8] Therefore, those who invoke God's blessing through the Church are invited to "strengthen their dispositions through faith, for which all things are possible" and to trust in "the love that urges the observance of God's commandments."^[9] This is why, while "there is always and everywhere an opportunity to praise God through Christ, in the Holy Spirit," there is also a care to do so with "things, places, or circumstances that do not contradict the law or the spirit of the Gospel."^[10] This is a liturgical understanding of blessings insofar as they are rites officially proposed by the Church.

11. Basing itself on these considerations, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's *Explanatory Note* to its 2021 *Responsum* recalls that when a blessing is invoked on certain human relationships by a special liturgical rite, it is necessary that what is blessed corresponds with God's designs written in creation and fully revealed by Christ the Lord. For this reason, since the Church has always considered only those sexual relations that are lived out within marriage to be morally licit, the Church does not have the power to confer its liturgical blessing when that would somehow offer a form of moral legitimacy to a union that presumes to be a marriage or to an extra-marital sexual practice. The Holy Father reiterated the substance of this Declaration in his *Respuestas* to the *Dubia* of two Cardinals.

12. One must also avoid the risk of reducing the meaning of blessings to this point of view alone, for it would lead us to expect the same moral conditions for a simple blessing that are called for in the reception of the sacraments. Such a risk requires that we broaden this perspective further. Indeed, there is the danger that a pastoral gesture that is so beloved

and widespread will be subjected to too many moral prerequisites, which, under the claim of control, could overshadow the unconditional power of God's love that forms the basis for the gesture of blessing.

13. Precisely in this regard, Pope Francis urged us not to "lose pastoral charity, which should permeate all our decisions and attitudes" and to avoid being "judges who only deny, reject, and exclude."^[11] Let us then respond to the Holy Father's proposal by developing a broader understanding of blessings.

Blessings in sacred Scripture

14. To reflect on blessings by gathering different points of view, we first need to be enlightened by the voice of Scripture.

15. "May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace" (Num. 6:24-26). This "priestly blessing" we find in the Old Testament, specifically in the Book of Numbers, has a "descending" character since it represents the invocation of a blessing that descends from God upon man: it is one of the oldest texts of divine blessing. Then, there is a second type of blessing we find in the biblical pages: that which "ascends" from earth to heaven, toward God. Blessing in this sense amounts to praising, celebrating, and thanking God for his mercy and his faithfulness, for the wonders he has created, and for all that has come about by his will: "Bless the Lord, my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!" (Ps. 103:1).

16. To God who blesses, we also respond by blessing. Melchizedek, King of Salem, blesses Abram (cf. Gen. 14:19); Rebekah is blessed by family members just before she becomes the bride of Isaac (cf. Gen. 24:60), who, in turn, blesses his son, Jacob (cf. Gen. 27:27). Jacob blesses Pharaoh (cf. Gen. 47:10), his own grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh (cf. Gen. 48:20), and his twelve sons (cf. Gen. 49:28). Moses and Aaron bless the community (cf. Ex. 39:43; Lev. 9:22). The heads of households bless their children at weddings, before embarking on a journey, and in the imminence of death. These blessings, accordingly, appear to be a superabundant and unconditional gift.

17. The blessing found in the New Testament retains essentially the same meaning it had in the Old Testament. We find the divine gift that "descends," the human thanksgiving that "ascends," and the blessing imparted by man that "extends" toward others. Zechariah, having regained the use of speech, blesses the Lord for his wondrous works (cf. Lk. 1:64). Simeon, while holding the newborn Jesus in his arms, blesses God for granting him the grace to contemplate the saving Messiah, and then blesses the child's parents, Mary and Joseph (cf. Lk. 2:34). Jesus blesses the Father in the famous hymn of praise and exultation he addressed to him: "I praise you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth" (Mt. 11:25).

18. In continuity with the Old Testament, in Jesus as well the blessing is not only ascending, referring to the Father, but is also descending,

being poured out on others as a gesture of grace, protection, and goodness. Jesus himself implemented and promoted this practice. For example, he blessed children: "And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them" (Mk. 10:16). And Jesus' earthly journey will end precisely with a final blessing reserved for the Eleven, shortly before he ascends to the Father: "And lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven" (Lk. 24:50-51). The last image of Jesus on earth is that of his hands being raised in the act of blessing.

19. In his mystery of love, through Christ, God communicates to his Church the power to bless. Granted by God to human beings and bestowed by them on their neighbors, the blessing is transformed into inclusion, solidarity, and peacemaking. It is a positive message of comfort, care, and encouragement. The blessing expresses God's merciful embrace and the Church's motherhood, which invites the faithful to have the same feelings as God toward their brothers and sisters.

A theological-pastoral understanding of blessings

20. One who asks for a blessing show himself to be in need of God's saving presence in his life and one who asks for a blessing from the Church recognizes the latter as a sacrament of the salvation that God offers. To seek a blessing in the Church is to acknowledge that the life of the Church springs from the womb of God's mercy and helps us to move forward, to live better, and to respond to the Lord's will.

21. In order to help us understand the value of a more pastoral approach to blessings, Pope Francis urges us to contemplate, with an attitude of faith and fatherly mercy, the fact that "when one asks for a blessing, one is expressing a petition for God's assistance, a plea to live better, and confidence in a Father who can help us live better."^[12] This request should, in every way, be valued, accompanied, and received with gratitude. People who come spontaneously to ask for a blessing show by this request their sincere openness to transcendence, the confidence of their hearts that they do not trust in their own strength alone, their need for God, and their desire to break out of the narrow confines of this world, enclosed in its limitations.

22. As St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus teaches us, this confidence "is the sole path that leads us to the Love that grants everything. With confidence, the wellspring of grace overflows into our lives [...]. It is most fitting, then, that we should place heartfelt trust not in ourselves but in the infinite mercy of a God who loves us unconditionally [...]. The sin of the world is great but not infinite, whereas the merciful love of the Redeemer is indeed infinite."^[13]

23. When considered outside of a liturgical framework, these expressions of faith are found in a realm of greater spontaneity and freedom. Nevertheless, "the optional nature of pious exercises should in no way be taken to imply an under-

(First of two parts)

Status of the Society of St Pius X: Revisiting a malingering problem

By FR. JAIME B. ACHACOSO, J.C.D.

With the brouhaha provoked by the most recent Declaration of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, entitled *Fiducia Supplicans*: On the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings, of 18 December 2023, a nagging issue has once again bubbled to the surface, like foul gases rise up from a murky creek. This is the whole issue of the false traditionalism that continues to plague many an unwary Catholic, confused by the current issues, which some sectors of the Church have weaponized to sow disunity with the doctrine of Vatican II and with the pastoral approach of Pope Francis.

At the forefront of this confusion is the Society of Pope Pius X, founded by the French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre. In the Philippines they have a temple along Valley Road in New Manila (Quezon City).

In order to fully understand this question and in the service of the truth—given that a half-truth is the worst lie—we have to dedicate two issues of this column, starting with a backgrounder in the present one. This matter has previously been tackled in a two-part article in this same publication back in 2009. This present article simply updates that material with more recent dispositions from the Holy See.

A short background on Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre and the Society of St Pius X

In November 1970, French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre founded the *Society of St Pius X* (SSPX), with a seminary in Ecône (France). In the confused doctrinal environment of the so-called post-conciliar crisis, the Ecône Seminary was initially welcomed as a bastion of Catholic orthodoxy, even receiving a commendatory letter from the Congregation for the Clergy in February 1971. However, Lefebvre's exaggerated idea of Tradition soon led him to condemn the Second Vatican Council (especially its teachings on ecumenism) and the *Novus Ordo* (the new Order of Mass that came in force in 1970).

In May 1975, the Holy See ordered Lefebvre to close the Ecône Seminary and in June 1976—given his refusal to obey—suspended him from ordaining. What followed was a sad

chapter—still unfinished—in the history of the Church. Archbishop Lefebvre continued to distance himself from the Holy See, continued to ordain priests, and in June 1988 committed the schismatic act of consecrating, without papal mandate and against the explicit prohibition of the Holy See, four bishops for the Society of St Pius X. With this, he incurred the automatic penalty of excommunication—a fact declared by a solemn *Decree of Excommunication* issued by the Sacred Congregation for Bishops on 1 July 1988, and confirmed by Pope John Paul II through the Apostolic Letter *Ecclesia Dei*, issued *motu proprio* on 2 July 1988.

John Paul II himself explained Lefebvre's error thus: *The root of this schismatic act can be discerned in an incomplete and contradictory notion of tradition. Incomplete, because it does not take sufficiently into account the living character of tradition ... But especially contradictory is a notion of tradition which opposes the universal Magisterium of the Church possessed by the bishop of Rome and the body of bishops. It is impossible to remain faithful to the tradition while breaking the ecclesial bond with him to whom, in the person of the apostle Peter, Christ himself entrusted the ministry of unity in his church (Ecclesia Dei, n.4).*

Schismatic nature of the Lefebvre Movement & the excommunication of its bishops in 1988

The Code of Canon Law gives the following definition: *[S]chism is the refusal of submission to the Roman Pontiff or of communion with the members of the Church subject to him (c.751).* Lefebvre's defenders argue that the consecration of the four bishops in June 1988 did not constitute schism as defined by Canon Law. Without getting into the details, we can simply recall that the Code itself established—following canonical doctrine—that *laws are authentically interpreted by the legislator and by the one to whom the legislator has granted the power to interpret them authentically (CIC, c.16, §1).* John Paul II was the legislator at the time of the promulgation of the 1983 Code of Canon Law; thus, he was the most qualified to interpret it, not only because of his role as Pope (which of itself gave him the right to determine the Code's meaning), but also because it was by his authority that the Code

was originally promulgated. His interpretation of the Code was thus—by definition—guaranteed to be accurate.

John Paul II explained that the consecrations of June 1988 constituted a schismatic act, not simply because they were unauthorized (i.e., without the mandate from the Holy See as required by Law), but because they were directly disobedient (i.e., against an expressed prohibition to proceed with such consecration) to the Roman Pontiff in a very grave matter: *In itself this act was one of disobedience to the Roman Pontiff in a very grave matter and of supreme importance for the unity of the church, such as is the ordination of bishops whereby the apostolic succession is sacramentally perpetuated. Hence such disobedience—which implies in practice the rejection of the Roman primacy—constitutes a schismatic act (Ecclesia Dei, n.3).*

As a result, the Pope declared quite clearly: *In performing such an act, notwithstanding the formal canonical warning sent to them by the cardinal prefect of the Congregation for Bishops last June 17, Archbishop Lefebvre and the priests Bernard Fellay, Bernard Tissier de Mallerais, Richard Williamson and Alfonso de Galarreta have incurred the grave penalty of excommunication envisaged by ecclesiastical law (ibid.).*

Formal papal prohibition of supporting and participating in the Lefebvre Movement

In the *Decree of Excommunication* of 1.VII.1988, the Sacred Congregation for Bishops solemnly declared: *The priests and faithful are warned not to support the schism of Monsignor Lefebvre; otherwise they shall incur ipso facto the very grave penalty of excommunication.*

Because of the danger the new schism posed to souls, John Paul II further issued a direct and solemn appeal to the faithful to stop any and all support for the SSPX: *In the present circumstances I wish especially to make an appeal both solemn and heartfelt, paternal and fraternal, to all those who until now have been linked in various ways to the movement of Archbishop Lefebvre, that they may fulfill the ... duty ... of ceasing their support in any way for that movement (Ecclesia Dei, n.5, c).*

He also specifically warned against

formally adhering to the Lefebvrist schism: *Everyone should be aware that formal adherence to the schism is a grave offense against God and carries the penalty of excommunication decreed by the Church's law (ibid.).*

This was the Church's definitive—and current up to this moment—statement on the subject of the status of Lefebvre and his organization. Nevertheless, to further clarify the issue, we need to distinguish between the clerics involved in the Lefebvre Movement and the laymen who participate in it.

Canonical status of priests and laymen of the Society of St Pius X

In a document of 26.VIII.1996, the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts (PCILT) clarified that the *automatic excommunication* declared by the two aforementioned documents as regards Lefebvre and the Society of Pius X is premised on a *formal adherence* to the schism. While respecting the competence of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith as regards the notion of *formal adherence to the schism*, the Pontifical Council clarified that such adherence implies two complimentary elements:

1st an *internal element*, consisting in a free and conscious agreement with the substance of the schism—i.e., to opt to follow Lefebvre rather than to obey the Pope;

2nd an *external element*, consisting in the exteriorization of such option, the clearest manifestation of which would be the *exclusive participation in the ecclesial acts of the Lefebvrist Movement, without taking part in the acts of the Catholic Church.*

The document was quick to clarify, however, that this latter does *not* constitute an unequivocal sign, since it is possible for any faithful to participate in liturgical acts of the SSPX without necessarily sharing in

its schismatic spirit. In fact, in the concrete case of Filipino faithful in Metro Manila who continue to attend Masses at the Our Lady of Victories church in New Manila, many are normally driven by their love for the eucharist and are drawn to the visibly pious celebration of the Holy Mass in that temple.

The above considerations resulted in a different treatment of clerics as compared to lay people in the SSPX as regards their canonical status:

1st *In the case of the deacons and priests*, it would seem that their ministerial activities within the schismatic movement was a clear sign of the presence of the two aforementioned elements, constituting a formal adherence to the schism. Thus, regardless of how they may present themselves in attire and manners, *canonically they were considered under automatic excommunication.*

2nd *In the case of the other faithful*, however, the document stated that an occasional participation in liturgical acts or activities of the Lefebvrist Movement—done without identifying themselves with the doctrinal and disciplinary disunity of the movement with the Holy See—would not be sufficient to imply a formal adherence to the schism. The document emphasized the need to take into account, above all, the intention of the person and whatever external manifestation of their interior dispositions. Thus, the document concluded, *the various situations should be judged in a case-to-case basis, in the competent seat of the external or internal forum.*

Preliminary conclusions

This was the situation for the remainder of the Pontificate of John Paul II and the whole Pontificate of Benedict XVI, who—as John Paul II's right-hand man in the whole Lefebvre

Society of St. Pius X / B6



PHOTO BY MICHAEL DALOGOS

Q: I am an extraordinary minister of holy Communion, which in the Archdiocese of Manila is limited to men. My question involves the order in which the servers enter during the processional. There is confusion on who would enter first—the reader carrying the lectionary, or the extraordinary minister of holy Communion. The woman who carries the lectionary is under the impression that she should enter before the priest because she carries the Word of God, and therefore is more important than someone

whose role is merely to dispense the holy Communion. Is she correct? — A.P., Manila, Philippines

A: There are really several questions involved. One regards whether the reader should carry in the lectionary; the other, concerns the order of procession.

Regarding these questions, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), No. 120, states:

"Once the people have gathered, the priest and ministers, clad in the sacred vestments, go in procession to the altar in this order:

"The thurifer carrying a thurible with burning incense, if incense is used;

"The ministers who carry lighted candles, and between them an acolyte or other minister with the cross;

"The acolytes and the other ministers;

"A lector, who may carry the Book of the Gospels (though not the Lectionary), which should be slightly elevated;

"The priest who is to celebrate the Mass.

"If incense is used, before the procession begins, the priest puts

some in the thurible and blesses it with the Sign of the Cross without saying anything."

This would be the plan in a parish Mass without a deacon. If a deacon is present he should carry the Book of the Gospels.

Note that the norm above is quite clear: Only the Book of the Gospels is carried in procession, not the lectionary.

The Book of the Gospels is either an elegant book containing the official liturgical text of the Gospels, or a book in which the Gospel texts used in the liturgy are already divided up and ordered according to the times and seasons of the year.

These books are also frequently decorated with elaborate covers in metal, cloth or leather. They are usually quite expensive and not all parishes have them. Indeed, some countries have yet to print them in the local tongue and have recourse to Gospels in Latin or another language into which they insert a copy of the Gospel of the day.

Although the whole Bible is God's word, all liturgical traditions accord special treatment to the Gospels—it is placed upon the altar before use, carried between candles, its reading or singing is reserved to the ordained, and all stand while it is being read.

If the parish uses only the lectionary (the book containing all of the readings) then it is placed at the ambo before Mass and no

book is carried during the entrance procession.

As mentioned above, the Gospels are usually carried by the deacon or, if lacking, an instituted lector.

It does not appear that the liturgical norms, as written, foresee that the Book of the Gospels be carried by a lay person, male or female, who acts as a substitute reader for an instituted lector as the norms mention only that the lector may be substituted for the readings and omit any mention of carrying the Gospels.

However, since this practice is in fact quite widespread and has not been expressly forbidden, perhaps a fairly good case could be made that it has gained the force of custom.

Therefore, if the lector, or on the presupposition that it is permitted, the substitute reader, carries the Gospels, his or her position is right in front of the priest.

If the Gospels are not used, then the reader(s) may follow after the acolytes and other ministers (including extraordinary ministers of holy Communion) mentioned above.

However, there is no obligation for extraordinary ministers of Communion (or readers for that matter) to take part in the entrance procession at all. They may be in their places from before Mass if the logistics of the church building and the sanctuary space augur against complicated processions.

Who goes first in a procession

Father Edward McNamara, professor of liturgy at the Regina Apostolorum Pontifical University, answers the following query:

(Note: The following is full text of the homily delivered during the opening of the Bishops-Formators Conference of the Ecclesiastical Province of Palo, held on January 2-4, 2024; at the St. John the Evangelist School of Theology)

Encounter and accompaniment in the priestly and seminary formation

By BISHOP ISABELO ABARQUEZ



The Ecclesiastical Province of Palo, which includes the Archdiocese of Palo and the dioceses of Calbayog, Borongan, Catarman, and Naval, convened for the Bishops-Formators Meeting from January 2 to 4, 2024, at the St. John the Evangelist School of Theology in Palo, Leyte. The three-day meeting focused on discussing the Ratio Formalis Sacerdotalis Nationalis (RFSN) document of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP). PHOTO FROM SJEST

YOUR Excellences—my brother-bishops, my brother-priests, seminarians, my brothers in Christ maupay nga aga ha iyo nga tanan!

My sharing this morning has nothing to do with all the readings we have just heard. My sharing has something to do with the theme given to me just a week ago. The theme given to me for our personal and communal reflection this morning is “Encounter and Accompaniment in the Priestly and Seminary Formation.”

Yesterday, in our encounter with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament during our Holy Hour, Fr. Apurillo reminded us that encounter with God is one of the important elements in our vocation discernment. He did not just remind us; he also expounded it to us. So to avoid redundancy, for my sharing this morning, I would just like to focus more on the Accompaniment.

In one of the seminaries, here in the Visayas, I saw a beautiful wall frame with an equally beautiful caption written on it that says, “Life is not a problem to be solved but a mystery to be lived.” Yes, life is a mystery to be lived. As a mystery, life continues to unfold everyday regardless of age. Life continues to offer us something new in spite of our age. Life as a mystery, in the context of formation, implies that formation is from the womb to the tomb.

In a book from the Congregation for the Clergy, entitled “The Gift of the Priestly Vocation”, on the topic “The Foundations of Formation” has this to say, “During the process of formation for the ministerial priesthood, the seminarian is a “mystery to himself”, in which two aspects of his humanity, that need to be integrated, are intertwined and exist side by side. On the one hand a seminarian is characterized by talents and gifts that have been molded by grace; on the other hand a seminarian is marked by his limits and frailty. These two aspects of his humanity that made him a “mystery to himself” have to be unpacked and unboxed for him to know more of his being a “mystery to himself”. Hence, encounter and accompaniment by the formators is necessary. In the process of unpacking and unboxing the seminarian can be helped in looking into the purity of his intention as well as the purity of his motivation.

The task of formation is to help the person to integrate these aspects, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, in a journey of faith and of gradual and harmonious maturity, avoiding

fragmentation, polarization, excesses, superficiality or partiality. The time of formation for priestly ministry is a period of testing, maturing and discernment by both the seminarian and the house of formation. As I said, the task of formation is to integrate the two aspects I just mentioned. For an integrated formation of the candidate, it is necessary to reflect on the identity of the priest. Here we explained to the seminarians the theology of priesthood, priest as alter Christus, priest as ipse Christus and many more. These are part of the journey of priestly formation as Configuration to Christ. How can a seminarian configure to Christ, the high priest, if he does not know the priesthood of Christ?

To configure to Christ, a formation for Interior Life and Communion is very necessary. What are some of the Means of Formation to achieve this? First—Personal Accompaniment. Seminarians need to be accompanied in a personal way in the various stages of their journey by those entrusted with the work of formation, each according to his proper role and competence. The purpose of personal accompaniment is to carry out vocational discernment and to form the missionary disciple. Personal accompaniment, which has docility to the Holy Spirit as its goal is an indispensable means of formation. In a personal accompaniment, conversation with formators should be regular and frequent. It is the task of every formator, each according to his proper responsibilities, to assist the seminarian in becoming aware of his condition, of the talents that he received, and of his frailties, so that he can become ever more receptive to the action of grace. A necessary element in the process of accompaniment is mutual trust, between the formator and the seminarian and docility to the stirring of the Holy Spirit.

S e c o n d — C o m m u n i t y accompaniment. Community life during the years of initial formation must make an impact on each individual, purifying his intentions and transforming the conduct of his life as he gradually conforms himself to Christ. Formation comes about every day through interpersonal relationships. A community of this kind will benefit future relationships with the bishop, with the brothers in the priesthood and with the faithful.

I know of one priest, a Samaron but ordained and incardinated in the diocese of New Orleans. One time I

visited him in New Orleans and along the way, while we were roaming around, he pointed out to me the theology seminary where he studied theology and said, “That is the seminary where I was formed to be individualistic”.

It is good, my fellow formators, that we have this theme for our reflection today, “Encounter and Accompaniment in the Priestly and Seminary Formation” because we can never exaggerate the need, which nowadays can be regarded as urgent, to take care of our seminarians and priests.

With the rapidly changing environments, with all sorts of developments coming up in the different sectors of society, there is a great need to help our seminarians and priests to face these new challenges properly and effectively, that is, with the true spirit of Christ who knows how to adapt Himself to all kinds of persons and conditions without ever losing sight of His mission.

We all know that our Christian formation, that involves all aspects of our life, never ends. It is a continuing affair, a work in progress, always evolving as it tackles the changing environment—social, cultural etc.—while remaining ever faithful to its ultimate mission. We should have structures and systems, both formal and informal that would keep this continuing formation going. The encounter and accompaniment we all need should never stop.

With the rise of the new technologies, for example, we are all challenged on how we can use them properly, knowing that they can be double-edged, that they can have double effects. Yes, they can be powerful tools for evangelization, but they also can trap us and even bind us in some hidden bondage due to the many temptations that they can give rise to. It is important that those involved in the formation of priests and seminarians be adequately prepared and equipped to deal with this challenge.

We cannot overemphasize the need for all of us—bishops, priests and others involved in the continuing formation of the priests and seminarians—to take to heart all the things and points mentioned in the New Ratio Fundamentalis.

In this regard, let us see to it that all the means of formation—both personal and collective—be thoroughly prepared and animated by the proper spirit of Christ. We have to see to it that these means of formation are given seriously, that they spring really from the heart that earnestly tries to reflect the heart of

Christ. We have to be wary of just being formalistic about it, or just giving them out of routine and passive compliance of what is expected of the giver or formator of these means of formation.

I also believe that what would be helpful to all of us is when we avail ourselves of what we may call as a plan of life, consisting of certain acts or practices of piety that would include prayer, recourse to the sacraments especially confession and the Eucharist. It should also include continuing studies of not only of theology, philosophy and other ecclesiastical subjects but also of some secular subjects that can serve to deepen our spiritual life and sharpen our pastoral concern.

This plan of life should also include regular spiritual direction with a spiritual director so that the spiritual life of each one is properly monitored and guided. We cannot deny that even if we consider ourselves spiritually mature, we still continue to have issues that need to be resolved or to be handled in some effective way. This way, we can be more assured of being faithful to our vocation.

And again, given the new developments that often lead us to be isolated from each other, we need to foster family and fraternal spirit among ourselves, and to sharpen our defenses against the usual dangers in the area of holy purity, poverty, order—like the proper use of our time and resources.

Lastly, an area to look into especially nowadays, given the growing complexity and complicatedness of the environment is the need to teach and to learn the art of proper discernment. We cannot afford to be simplistic that would lead us to be like the scribe and Pharisees during the time of Jesus. We really need to have the heart of Christ so we can accommodate everyone; no matter how different they are, so that we can be, as St. Paul once said, “All things to all men” for the purpose of the salvation of mankind.

As we continue with our Eucharistic celebration, let us humbly ask God, through the powerful intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, our Hope and Seat of Wisdom, to bless us with the necessary graces we badly need as we begin another year of walking together in the work and ministry of formation.

May God bless us all!

(Most Rev. Isabelo C. Abarquez, D.D. is the bishop of the Diocese of Calbayog in Samar province)

Fiducia Supplicans / B1

estimation or even disrespect for such practices. The way forward in this area requires a correct and wise appreciation of the many riches of popular piety, [and] of the potentiality of these same riches.”[14] In this way, blessings become a pastoral resource to be valued rather than a risk or a problem.

24. From the point of view of pastoral care, blessings should be evaluated as acts of devotion that “are external to the celebration of the Holy Eucharist and of the other sacraments.” Indeed, the “language, rhythm, course, and theological emphasis” of popular piety differ “from those of the corresponding liturgical action.” For this reason, “pious practices must conserve their proper style, simplicity, and language, [and] attempts to impose forms of ‘liturgical celebration’ on them are always to be avoided.”[15]

25. The Church, moreover, must shy away from resting its pastoral praxis on the fixed nature of certain doctrinal or disciplinary schemes, especially when they lead to “a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism, whereby instead of evangelizing, one analyzes and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and verifying.”[16] Thus, when people ask for a blessing, an exhaustive moral analysis should not be placed as a precondition for conferring it. For, those seeking a blessing should not be required to have prior moral perfection.

26. In this perspective, the Holy Father’s *Respuestas* aid in expanding the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s 2021 pronouncement from a pastoral point of view. For, the *Respuestas* invite discernment concerning the possibility of “forms of blessing, requested by one or more persons, that do not convey an erroneous conception of marriage”[17] and, in situations that are morally unacceptable from an objective point of view, account for the fact that “pastoral charity requires us not to treat simply as ‘sinners’ those whose guilt or responsibility may be attenuated by various factors affecting subjective imputability.”[18]

27. In the catechesis cited at the beginning of this Declaration, Pope Francis proposed a description of this kind of blessing that is offered to all without requiring anything. It is worth reading these words with an open heart, for they help us grasp the pastoral meaning of blessings offered without preconditions: “It is God who blesses. In the first pages of the Bible, there is a continual repetition of blessings. God blesses, but humans also give blessings, and soon it turns out that the blessing possesses a special power, which accompanies those who receive it throughout their lives, and disposes man’s heart to be changed by God. [...] So we are more important to God than all the sins we can commit because he is father, he is mother, he is pure love, he has blessed us forever. And he will never stop blessing us. It is a powerful experience to read these biblical texts of blessing in a prison or in a rehabilitation group. To make those people feel that they are still blessed, notwithstanding their serious mistakes, that their heavenly Father continues to will their good and to hope that they will ultimately open themselves to the good. Even if their closest relatives have abandoned them, because they now judge them to be irredeemable, God always sees them as his children.”[19]

28. There are several occasions when people spontaneously ask for a blessing, whether on pilgrimages, at shrines, or even on the street when they meet a priest. By way of example, we can refer to the *Book of Blessings*, which provides several rites for blessing people, including the elderly, the sick, participants in a catechetical or prayer meeting, pilgrims, those embarking on a journey, volunteer groups and associations, and more. Such blessings are meant for everyone; no one is to be excluded from them. In the introduction to the *Order for the Blessing of Elderly People*, for example, it is stated that the purpose of this blessing is “so that the elderly themselves may receive from their brethren a testimony of respect and gratitude, while together with them, we give thanks to the Lord for the favors they received from him and for the good they did with his

help.”[20] In this case, the subject of the blessing is the elderly person, for whom and with whom thanks is being given to God for the good he has done and for the benefits received. No one can be prevented from this act of giving thanks, and each person—even if he or she lives in situations that are not ordered to the Creator’s plan—possesses positive elements for which we can praise the Lord.

29. From the perspective of the ascending dimension, when one becomes aware of the Lord’s gifts and his unconditional love, even in sinful situations—particularly when a prayer finds a hearing—the believer’s heart lifts its praise to God and blesses him. No one is precluded from this type of blessing. Everyone, individually or together with others, can lift their praise and gratitude to God.

30. The popular understanding of blessings, however, also values the importance of descending blessings. While “it is not appropriate for a Diocese, a Bishops’ Conference, or any other ecclesial structure to constantly and officially establish procedures or rituals for all kinds of matters,”[21] pastoral prudence and wisdom—avoiding all serious forms of scandal and confusion among the faithful—may suggest that the ordained minister join in the prayer of those persons who, although in a union that cannot be compared in any way to a marriage, desire to entrust themselves to the Lord and his mercy, to invoke his help, and to be guided to a greater understanding of his plan of love and of truth.

III. Blessings of couples in irregular situations and of couples of the same sex

31. Within the horizon outlined here appears the possibility of blessings for couples in irregular situations and for couples of the same sex, the form of which should not be fixed ritually by ecclesial authorities to avoid producing confusion with the blessing proper to the Sacrament of Marriage. In such cases, a blessing may be imparted that not only has an ascending value but also involves the invocation of a blessing that descends from God upon those who—recognizing themselves to be destitute and in need of his help—do not claim a legitimation of their own status, but who beg that all that is true, good, and humanly valid in their lives and their relationships be enriched, healed, and elevated by the presence of the Holy Spirit. These forms of blessing express a supplication that God may grant those aids that come from the impulses of his Spirit—what classical theology calls “actual grace”—so that human relationships may mature and grow in fidelity to the Gospel, that they may be freed from their imperfections and frailties, and that they may express themselves in the ever-increasing dimension of the divine love.

32. Indeed, the grace of God works in the lives of those who do not claim to be righteous but who acknowledge themselves humbly as sinners, like everyone else. This grace can orient everything according to the mysterious and unpredictable designs of God. Therefore, with its untiring wisdom and motherly care, the Church welcomes all who approach God with humble hearts, accompanying them with those spiritual aids that enable everyone to understand and realize God’s will fully in their existence.[22]

33. This is a blessing that, although not included in any liturgical rite,[23] unites intercessory prayer with the invocation of God’s help by those who humbly turn to him. God never turns away anyone who approaches him! Ultimately, a blessing offers people a means to increase their trust in God. The request for a blessing, thus, expresses and nurtures openness to the transcendence, mercy, and closeness to God in a thousand concrete circumstances of life, which is no small thing in the world in which we live. It is a seed of the Holy Spirit that must be nurtured, not hindered.

34. The Church’s liturgy itself invites us to adopt this trusting attitude, even in the midst of our sins, lack of merits, weaknesses, and confusions, as witnessed by this beautiful Collect from the Roman Missal: “Almighty ever-living God, who in the abundance of your kindness surpass the merits and the desires of those who entreat

you, pour out your mercy upon us to pardon what conscience dreads and to give what prayer does not dare to ask” (Collect for the Twenty-Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time). How often, through a pastor’s simple blessing, which does not claim to sanction or legitimize anything, can people experience the nearness of the Father, beyond all “merits” and “desires”?

35. Therefore, the pastoral sensibility of ordained ministers should also be formed to perform blessings spontaneously that are not found in the *Book of Blessings*.

36. In this sense, it is essential to grasp the Holy Father’s concern that these non-ritualized blessings never cease being simple gestures that provide an effective means of increasing trust in God on the part of the people who ask for them, careful that they should not become a liturgical or semi-liturgical act, similar to a sacrament. Indeed, such a ritualization would constitute a serious impoverishment because it would subject a gesture of great value in popular piety to excessive control, depriving ministers of freedom and spontaneity in their pastoral accompaniment of people’s lives.

37. In this regard, there come to mind the following words of the Holy Father, already quoted in part: “Decisions that may be part of pastoral prudence in certain circumstances should not necessarily become a norm. That is to say, it is not appropriate for a Diocese, a Bishops’ Conference, or any other ecclesial structure to constantly and officially establish procedures or rituals for all kinds of matters [...]. Canon Law should not and cannot cover everything, nor should the Episcopal Conferences claim to do so with their various documents and protocols, since the life of the Church flows through many channels besides the normative ones.”[24] Thus Pope Francis recalled that “what is part of a practical discernment in particular circumstances cannot be elevated to the level of a rule” because this “would lead to an intolerable casuistry.”[25]

38. For this reason, one should neither provide for nor promote a ritual for the blessings of couples in an irregular situation. At the same time, one should not prevent or prohibit the Church’s closeness to people in every situation in which they might seek God’s help through a simple blessing. In a brief prayer preceding this spontaneous blessing, the ordained minister could ask that the individuals have peace, health, a spirit of patience, dialogue, and mutual assistance—but also God’s light and strength to be able to fulfill his will completely.

39. In any case, precisely to avoid any form of confusion or scandal, when the prayer of blessing is requested by a couple in an irregular situation, even though it is expressed outside the rites prescribed by the liturgical books, this blessing should never be imparted in concurrence with the ceremonies of a civil union, and not even in connection with them. Nor can it be performed with any clothing, gestures, or words that are proper to a wedding. The same applies when the blessing is requested by a same-sex couple.

40. Such a blessing may instead find its place in other contexts, such as a visit to a shrine, a meeting with a priest, a prayer recited in a group, or during a pilgrimage. Indeed, through these blessings that are given not through the ritual forms proper to the liturgy but as an expression of the Church’s maternal heart—similar to those that emanate from the core of popular piety—there is no intention to legitimize anything, but rather to open one’s life to God, to ask for his help to live better, and also to invoke the Holy Spirit so that the values of the Gospel may be lived with greater faithfulness.

41. What has been said in this Declaration regarding the blessings of same-sex couples is sufficient to guide the prudent and fatherly discernment of ordained ministers in this regard. Thus, beyond the guidance provided above, no further responses should be expected about possible ways to regulate details or practicalities regarding blessings of this type.[26]

IV. The Church is the sacrament of God’s infinite love

42. The Church continues to lift up those prayers and supplications that Christ himself—with loud cries and tears—offered in his earthly life (cf. Heb. 5:7), and which enjoy a special efficacy for this reason. In this way, “not only by charity, example, and works of penance, but also by prayer does the ecclesial community exercise a true maternal function in bringing souls to Christ.”[27]

43. The Church is thus the sacrament of God’s infinite love. Therefore, even when a person’s relationship with God is clouded by sin, he can always ask for a blessing, stretching out his hand to God, as Peter did in the storm when he cried out to Jesus, “Lord, save me!” (Mt. 14:30). Indeed, desiring and receiving a blessing can be the possible good in some situations. Pope Francis reminds us that “a small step, in the midst of great human limitations, can be more pleasing to God than a life which appears outwardly in order but moves through the day without confronting great difficulties.”[28] In this way, “*what shines forth is the beauty of the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ, who died and rose from the dead.*”[29]

44. Any blessing will be an opportunity for a renewed proclamation of the *kerygma*, an invitation to draw ever closer to the love of Christ. As Pope Benedict XVI taught, “Like Mary, the Church is the mediator of God’s blessing for the world: she receives it in receiving Jesus and she transmits it in bearing Jesus. He is the mercy and the peace that the world, of itself, cannot give, and which it needs always, at least as much as bread.”[30]

45. Taking the above points into account and following the authoritative teaching of Pope Francis, this Dicastery finally wishes to recall that “the root of Christian meekness” is “the ability to feel blessed and the ability to bless [...]”. This world needs blessings, and we can give blessings and receive blessings. The Father loves us, and the only thing that remains for us is the joy of blessing him, and the joy of thanking him, and of learning from him [...] to bless.”[31] In this way, every brother and every sister will be able to feel that, in the Church, they are always pilgrims, always beggars, always loved, and, despite everything, always blessed.

Víctor Manuel Card. Fernández Prefect

Mons. Armando MATTEO Secretary for the Doctrinal Section

Ex Audientia Die 18 December 2023 Francis

[1] Francis, *Catechesis on Prayer: The Blessing* (2 December 2020).

[2] Cf. Congregatio pro Doctrina Fidei, «*Responsum ad «dubium» de benedictione unionem personarum eiusdem sexus et Nota esplicativa* (15 March 2021): AAS 113 (2021), 431-434.

[3] Francis, Ap. Exhort. *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), no. 42: AAS 105 (2013), 1037-1038.

[4] Cf. Francis, *Respuestas a los Dubia propuestos por dos Cardenales* (11 July 2023).

[5] *Ibid.*, ad dubium 2, c.

[6] *Ibid.*, ad dubium 2, a.

[7] Cfr. *Rituale Romanum ex decreto Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II instauratum auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. II promulgatum, De Benedictionibus, Praenotanda, Editio typica*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2013, no. 12.

[8] *Ibid.*, no. 11: “Quo autem clarius hoc pateat, antiqua ex traditione, formulæ benedictionum eo spectant ut imprimis Deum pro eius donis glorificandis eiusque impetrent beneficiâ atque maligni potestatem in mundo compescant.”

[9] *Ibid.*, no. 15: “Quare illi qui benedictionem Dei per Ecclesiam exposcunt, dispositiones suas ea fide confirmant, cui omnia sunt possibilis; spe innitantur, quae non confundit; caritate praesertim vivificantur, quae mandata Dei servanda urget.”

[10] *Ibid.*, no. 13: “Semper ergo et ubique occasio praebet Deum per Christum in Spiritu Sancto laudandi, invocandi eique gratias reddendi, dummodo agatur de rebus, locis, vel adiunctis quae normae vel spiritui Evangelii non contradicant.”

[11] Francis, *Respuestas a los Dubia propuestos por dos Cardenales*, ad dubium 2, d.

[12] *Ibid.*, ad dubium 2, e.

[13] Francis, Ap. Exhort. *C'est la Confiance* (15 October 2023), nos. 2, 20, 29.

[14] Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy, Principles and Guidelines* (9 April 2002), no. 12.

[15] *Ibid.*, no. 13.

[16] Francis, Exhort. Ap. *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), no. 94: AAS 105 (2013), 1060.

[17] Francis, *Respuestas a los Dubia propuestos por dos Cardenales*, ad dubium 2, e.

[18] *Ibid.*, ad dubium 2, f.

[19] Francis, *Catechesis on Prayer: The Blessing* (2 December 2020).

[20] *De Benedictionibus*, no. 258: “Haec benedictio hoc tendit ut ipsi senes a fratribus testimonium accipiant reverentiae grateaque mentis, dum simul cum ipsis Domino gratias reddimus pro beneficiis ab eo acceptis et pro bonis operibus eo adiuvante peractis.”

[21] Francis, *Respuestas a los Dubia propuestos por dos Cardenales*, ad dubium 2, g.

[22] Cf. Francis, Post-Synodal Ap. Exhort. *Amoris Laetitia* (19 March 2016), no. 250: AAS 108 (2016), 412-413.

[23] Cf. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* (9 April 2002), no. 13: “The objective difference between pious exercises and devotional practices should always be clear in expressions of worship. [...] Acts of devotion and piety are external to the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, and of the other sacraments.”

[24] Francis, *Respuestas a los Dubia propuestos por dos Cardenales*, ad dubium 2, g.

[25] Francis, Post-Synodal Ap. Exhort. *Amoris Laetitia* (19 March 2016), no. 304: AAS 108 (2016), 436.

[26] Cf. *ibid.*

[27] *Officium Divinum ex decreto Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II instauratum auctoritate Pauli PP. VI promulgatum, Liturgia Horarum iuxta Ritum Romanum, Institutio Generalis de Liturgia Horarum*, Editio typica altera, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1985, no. 17: “Itaque non tantum caritate, exemplo et paenitentiae operibus, sed etiam oratione ecclesialis communitas verum erga animas ad Christum adducendas maternum munus exercet.”

[28] Francis, Ap. Exhort. *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), no. 44: AAS 105 (2013), 1038-1039.

[29] *Ibid.*, no. 36: AAS 105 (2013), 1035.

[30] Benedict XVI, *Homily on the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, 45th World Day of Peace*, Vatican Basilica (1 January 2012): Insegnamenti VIII, 1 (2012), 3.

[31] Francis, *Catechesis on Prayer: The Blessing* (2 December 2020).

Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith

Press release concerning the reception of

Fiducia supplicans

4 January 2024



Headquarters of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. VATICAN MEDIA

WE are writing this press release to help clarify the reception of *Fiducia supplicans*, while recommending at the same time a full and calm reading of the *Declaration* so as to better understand its meaning and purpose.

1. Doctrine

The understandable statements of some Episcopal Conferences regarding the document *Fiducia supplicans* have the value of highlighting the need for a more extended period of pastoral reflection. What is expressed by these Episcopal Conferences cannot be interpreted as doctrinal opposition, because the document is clear and definitive about marriage and sexuality. There are several indisputable phrases in the Declaration that leave this in no doubt:

«This Declaration remains firm on the traditional doctrine of the Church about marriage, not allowing any type of liturgical rite or blessing similar to a liturgical rite that can create confusion». One acts in these situations of couples in irregular situations «without officially validating their status or changing in any way the Church's perennial teaching on marriage» (*Presentation*).

«Therefore, rites and prayers that could create confusion between what constitutes marriage – which is the “exclusive, stable, and indissoluble union between a man and a woman, naturally open to the generation of children” – and what contradicts it are inadmissible. This conviction is grounded in the perennial Catholic doctrine of marriage; it is only in this context that sexual relations find their natural, proper, and fully human meaning. The Church's doctrine on this point remains firm» (4).

«Such is also the meaning of the *Responsum* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which states that the Church does not have the power to impart blessings on unions of persons of the same sex» (5).

«For this reason, since the Church has always considered only those sexual relations that are lived out within marriage to be morally licit, the Church does not have the power to confer its liturgical blessing when that would somehow offer a form of moral legitimacy to a union that presumes to be a marriage or to an extra-marital sexual practice» (11).

Evidently, there is no room to distance ourselves doctrinally from this *Declaration* or to consider it heretical, contrary to the Tradition of the Church or blasphemous.

2. Practical reception

Some Bishops, however, express themselves in particular regarding a practical aspect: the possible blessings of couples in irregular situations. The Declaration contains a proposal for short and simple pastoral blessings (neither liturgical nor ritualised) of couples in irregular situations (but not of their unions), underlining that these are blessings without a liturgical format which neither approve nor justify the situation in which these people find themselves.

Documents of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith such as *Fiducia supplicans*, in their practical aspects, may require more or less time for their application depending on local contexts and the discernment of each diocesan Bishop with his Diocese. In some places no difficulties arise for their immediate application,

while in others it will be necessary not to introduce them, while taking the time necessary for reading and interpretation.

Some Bishops, for example, have established that each priest must carry out the work of discernment and that he may, however, perform these blessings only in private. None of this is problematic if it is expressed with due respect for a text signed and approved by the Supreme Pontiff himself, while attempting in some way to accommodate the reflection contained in it.

Each local Bishop, by virtue of his own ministry, always has the power of discernment *in loco*, that is, in that concrete place that he knows better than others precisely because it is his own flock. Prudence and attention to the ecclesial context and to the local culture could allow for different methods of application, but not a total or definitive denial of this path that is proposed to priests.

3. The delicate situation of some countries

The cases of some Episcopal Conferences must be understood in their contexts. In several countries there are strong cultural and even legal issues that require time and pastoral strategies that go beyond the short term.


If there are laws that condemn the mere act of declaring oneself as a homosexual with prison and in some cases with torture and even death, it goes without saying that a blessing would be imprudent. It is clear that the Bishops do not wish to expose homosexual persons to violence. It remains vital that these Episcopal Conferences do not support a doctrine different from that of the Declaration signed by the Pope, given that it is perennial doctrine, but rather that they recommend the need for study and discernment so as to act with pastoral prudence in such a context.

In truth, there are not a few countries that, to varying degrees, condemn, prohibit and criminalize homosexuality. In these cases, apart from the question of blessings, there exists a great and wide-ranging pastoral responsibility that includes training, the defense of human dignity, the teaching of the Social Doctrine of the Church and various strategies that do not admit of a rushed response.

4. The real novelty of the document

The real novelty of this *Declaration*, the one that requires a generous effort of reception and from which no one should declare themselves excluded, is not the possibility of blessing couples in irregular situations. It is the invitation to distinguish between two different forms of blessings: “liturgical or ritualized” and “spontaneous or pastoral”. The Presentation clearly explains that «the value of this document [...] is that it offers a specific and innovative contribution to the pastoral meaning of blessings, permitting a broadening and enrichment of the classical understanding of blessings, which is closely linked to a liturgical perspective». This «theological reflection, based on the pastoral vision of Pope Francis, implies a real development from what has been said about blessings in the Magisterium and the official texts of the Church».

In the background is found the positive evaluation of “popular pastoral



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF THE PHILIPPINES

On the Possibility of Blessings for Couples in Irregular Situations and for Couples of the Same Sex

LAST Monday, Dec. 18, 2023, the Vatican Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith released a Declaration entitled “Fiducia Supplicans”, with the approval of the Holy Father, Pope Francis. It is clear in its content and intent. Basically, it elaborates “On the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings”.

The document speaks for itself, and therefore does not require much explanation. In fact, in paragraph 41, it says, “What has been said in this Declaration regarding the blessings of same-sex couples is sufficient to guide the prudent and fatherly discernment of ordained ministers in this regard. Thus, beyond the guidance provided above, no further responses should be expected about possible ways to regulate details or practicalities regarding blessings of this type.”

Allow us therefore, in the name of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) to simply attach here a link to the document itself, for those interested to know and understand what the document itself is saying.

The document has an introduction where the Prefect of the said dicastery, Victor Manuel Cardinal Fernandez points out that “this declaration remains firm on the traditional doctrine of the Church about marriage, not allowing any type of liturgical rite or blessing similar to a liturgical rite that can create confusion.” What Cardinal Fernandez considers as unique value of this document is that “...it offers a specific and innovative contribution to the pastoral meaning of blessings, permitting a broadening and enrichment of the classical understanding of blessings...”

Five paragraphs—namely 13, 25, 31, 38, and 39—are worth highlighting in the document:

“...Pope Francis urged us not to close pastoral charity, which should permeate all our decisions and attitudes and to avoid being judges who only deny, reject, and exclude. Let us then respond to the Holy Father proposal by developing a broader understanding of blessings.” (FS13)

“...when people ask for a blessing, an exhaustive moral analysis should not be placed as a precondition for conferring it. For, those seeking a blessing should not be required to have prior moral perfection.” (FS25)

“Within the horizon outlined here appears the possibility of blessings for couples in irregular situations and for couples of the same sex, the form of which should not be fixed ritually by ecclesial authorities to avoid producing confusion with the blessing proper to the Sacrament of Marriage. In such cases, a blessing may be imparted... upon those who, recognizing themselves to be destitute and in need of his help, do not claim a legitimization of their own status, but who beg that all that is true, good, and humanly valid in their lives and their relationships be enriched, healed, and elevated by the presence of the Holy Spirit.” (FS31)

“For this reason, one should neither provide for nor promote a ritual for the blessings of couples in an irregular situation. At the same time, one should not prevent or prohibit the Church's closeness to people in every situation in which they might seek God's help through a simple blessing.” (FS38)

“...precisely to avoid any form of confusion or scandal, when the prayer of blessing is requested by a couple in an irregular situation... the blessing should never be imparted in concurrence with the ceremonies of a civil union, and not even in connection with them. Nor can it be performed with any clothing, gestures, or words that are proper to a wedding. The same applies when the blessing is requested by a same-sex couple.” (FS 39)

This advisory is hereby being issued for the information of the Roman Catholic faithful in the Philippines.

+PABLO VIRGILIO DAVID
Bishop of Kalookan
CBCP President
20 December 2023

care” which appears in many of the Holy Father's texts. In this context, the Holy Father invites us to value the simple faith of the People of God who, even in the midst of their sins, emerge from their everyday lives and open their hearts to ask for God's help.

For this reason, rather than the blessing of couples in irregular unions, the text of the Dicastery has adopted the other profile of a “Declaration”, which is much more than a *responsum* or a letter. The central theme, which invites us especially to a deeper pastoral practice which enriches our pastoral praxis, is to have a broader understanding of blessings and of the proposal that these pastoral blessings, which do not require the same conditions as blessings in a liturgical or ritual context, flourish. Consequently, leaving polemics aside, the text requires an effort to reflect serenely, with the heart of shepherds, free from all ideology.

Although some Bishops consider it prudent not to impart these blessings for the moment, we all need to grow equally in the conviction that: non-ritualized blessings are not a consecration of the person nor of the couple who receives them, they are not a justification of all their actions, and they are not an endorsement of the life that they lead. When the Pope asked us to grow in a broader understanding of pastoral blessings, he proposed that we think of a way of blessing that does not require the placing of so many conditions to carry out this simple gesture of pastoral closeness, which is a means of promoting openness to God in the midst of the most diverse circumstances.

5. How do these ‘pastoral blessings’ present themselves in concrete terms?

To be clearly distinguished from liturgical or ritualized blessings, “pastoral blessings” must above all be very short (see n. 38). These are blessings lasting a few seconds, without an approved ritual and without a book of blessings. If two people approach together to seek the blessing, one simply asks the Lord for peace, health and other good things for these two people who request it. At the same time, one asks that they may live the Gospel of Christ in full fidelity and so that the Holy Spirit can free these two people from everything that does not correspond to his divine will and from everything that requires purification.

This non-ritualized form of blessing, with the simplicity and brevity of its form, does not intend to justify anything that is not morally acceptable. Obviously it is not a marriage, but equally it is not an “approval” or ratification of anything either. It is solely the response of a pastor towards two persons who ask for God's help. Therefore, in this case, the pastor does not impose conditions and does not enquire about the intimate lives of these people.

Since some have raised the question of what these blessings might look like, let us look at a concrete example: let us imagine that among a large number making a pilgrimage a couple of divorced people, now in a new union, say to the priest: “Please give us a blessing, we cannot find work, he is very ill, we do not have a home and life is becoming very difficult: may God help us!”

In this case, the priest can recite a simple prayer like this: “Lord, look at these children of yours, grant them health, work, peace and mutual help. Free them from everything that contradicts your Gospel and allow them to live according to your will. Amen.” Then it concludes with the sign of the cross on each of the two persons.

We are talking about something that lasts about 10 or 15 seconds. Does it make sense to deny these kinds of blessings to these two people who ask for them? Is it not more appropriate to support their faith, whether it be small or great, to assist them in their weaknesses with a divine blessing, and to channel that openness to transcendence which could lead them to be more faithful to the Gospel?

In order to avoid any doubt, the *Declaration* adds that, when the blessing is requested by a couple in an irregular situation, «even though it is expressed outside the rites prescribed by the liturgical books, this blessing should never be imparted in concurrence with the ceremonies of a civil union, and not even in connection with them. Nor can it be performed with any clothing, gestures, or words that are proper to a wedding. The same applies when the blessing is requested by a same-sex couple» (n. 39). It remains clear, therefore, that the blessing must not take place in a prominent place within a sacred building, or in front of an altar, as this also would create confusion.

For this reason, every Bishop in

his Diocese is authorized by the Declaration *Fiducia supplicans* to make this type of simple blessing available, bearing in mind the need for prudence and care, but in no way is he authorized to propose or make blessings available that may resemble a liturgical rite.

6. Catechesis

In some places, perhaps, some catechesis will be necessary that can help everyone to understand that these types of blessings are not an endorsement of the life led by those who request them. Even less are they an absolution, as these gestures are far from being a sacrament or a rite. They are simple expressions of pastoral closeness that do not impose the same requirements as a sacrament or a formal rite. We will all have to become accustomed to accepting the fact that, if a priest gives this type of simple blessings, he is not a heretic, he is not ratifying anything nor is he denying Catholic doctrine.

We can help God's People to discover that these kinds of blessings are just simple pastoral channels that help people give expression to their faith, even if they are great sinners. For this reason, in giving a blessing to two people who come together to ask for it spontaneously, we are not consecrating them nor are we congratulating them nor indeed are we approving that type of union. In reality the same happens when individuals are blessed, as the individual who asks for a blessing – not absolution – could be a great sinner, but this does not mean we deny him this paternal gesture in the midst of his struggle to survive.

If this is clarified as a result of good catechesis, we can free ourselves from the fear that these blessings of ours may express something inadequate. We can be freer and perhaps closer and more fruitful ministers, with a ministry that is full of gestures of fatherhood and hospitality, without fear of being misunderstood.

We ask the newly-born Lord to shower a generous and gracious blessing upon everyone so that we can live a holy and happy 2024.

Victor Manuel Card. Fernández
Prefect

Mons. Armando Matteo
Secretary for the Doctrinal Section

EVERYDAY JESUS

By ARCHBISHOP SOCRATES VILLEGAS

www.fathersoc.com

Astonished

IN one short paragraph, Jesus astonished the people around Him for two significant reasons. Firstly, they were astounded by His preaching. Secondly, they were astounded by His healing.

Why were they astonished by His preaching? Because He spoke only the truth. Truth possesses its own power. It requires no sugar coating. It needs no techniques. When truth is conveyed as truth, it

invariably carries a liberating power. When our words fail to astound others, could it be because we speak from fear or seek favors? Truth is fearless and does not pursue favors. Truth is truth, and that is its inherent value.

The second reason why people were astonished at Jesus is that He healed. He healed out of compassion. He healed from love. He was love incarnate.

People were astonished because He was willing to go to great lengths to heal a man with an unclean spirit.

These are the two reasons why people were astonished by Jesus. He spoke the truth and lived with love. Truth and love, when united, possess infinite power. Truth and love, together, can liberate many. Yet, the first to be liberated, when truth and love converge, is ourselves.

Blindness



THE blind man could not see. That is a fact. Yet, he warns to me that even if he could sense or see with his being, he could not see with his eyes, but he could sense with his heart. That is why he immediately felt the disgust of the crowd. That is why he immediately felt the accepting attitude of Jesus. When God takes away our physical sight, experience teaches us that our other senses are sharpened. Such was the case of the blind man. He could not see with his eyes, but he could sense and see with the heart.

On the other hand, the crowd

around Jesus, the Apostles following the Lord, could see, but they did not like to look. They were playing blind. They did not even like to set their eyes on the blind man asking for help. That is the sad reality. You and I sometimes catch ourselves with a street child, begging for food and money, and we say to ourselves, "Oh, these beggars are run by syndicates." We rationalize that their parents abuse them, so we end up not giving them money.

But whoever told us that we are going to be diminished? Whoever said that the poor

will be spoiled if we just glance at them with kindness in our eyes or give them a simple look of concern, charity, and compassion.

Who are the people we do not like to see? Who are the people we play blind to? There are so many people we put in this category. Let me tell you that talking with them, looking at them, and seeing with the heart has never caused anybody to be spoiled or destroyed. God gave us eyes so that we can see. God gave us a heart so that we can see better. Let us use them all the time.

Thoughts to live by

Reflections for January 14, 2024
Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

By CARDINAL ORLANDO B. QUEVEDO

1. 1st Reading, 1 Sm. 3: 3-10, 19—Revelation to Samuel. When "Samuel was sleeping in the temple of the Lord where the ark of God was," the Lord called to him. He answered, "Here I am." Thinking it was the old Eli who had called, he went to Eli, but Eli said that he did not call him. This happened two more times. And Eli realized that it was the Lord who was calling. A third time the Lord called Samuel. As Eli had instructed, Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening" (v. 10).

2. Then the Lord revealed to Samuel the destruction of Eli and his house, because Eli had not reproved his sons' blasphemies (vv. 11-14). When Samuel told Eli what the Lord had told him, Eli answered, "It is the Lord. What is pleasing in the Lord's sight, the Lord will do" (v. 18). The great faith of Eli and resignation to God's holy will, bearing bad news—an example for the young Samuel and for us.

3. Resp. Ps. 40:2, 4, 7-8, 8-9, 20—A psalm of gratitude. "I wait for the Lord, who bends down to me and hears my cry" (v. 2). "He puts a new song in my mouth, a hymn to our God. Many shall look on in fear, and shall trust in the Lord" (v. 4). "Sacrifice and offering you do not want.... Holocaust and sin-offering you do not request" (vv. 7-8). So I said, "I delight to do your will my God, your law is in my inner being!" (v. 9). I sing of your righteousness in a great assembly" (v. 9). More than offerings and burnt sacrifices is doing God's will. David's psalm re-echoes Eli's faith and his devotion to God's holy will.

4. 2nd Reading, 1 Cor. 6: 13-15, 17-20—Paul reproves the Corinthians for bringing suits to pagan courts against their own co-believers, "the holy ones." They need to realize that the holy ones are more than capable of trustworthy judgments. Then Paul embarks on a deeply theological foundation for mutual trust and love.

5. Everything may be lawful but not everything is beneficial. The body is from God and, as God raised his Son from the dead, so will he raise our bodies (vv. 12-14). Our bodies are temples of Christ. "Whoever is joined

to the Lord becomes one spirit with him" (vv. 15-17). Therefore, whoever sins against the Lord, also sins against his own body, the temple of the Holy Spirit (vv. 18-19). "Glorify God in your body" (v. 20).

6. Gospel, Jn. 1:35-42 -- The call of the 1st disciples. In the previous verses, John the Baptist testifies that the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus. He will baptize with the Holy Spirit. "He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"

(vv. 29-33; see Rev. 5-7, 17:14; Ex. 12; Is. 53:7, 10). He is the Son of God" (v. 34).

7. Now, John is with 2 of his disciples. As Jesus walks by, John says, "Behold the Lamb of God" (vv. 35-36). His two disciples follow Jesus. Jesus asks them, "What are you looking for?" They answer, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" He says to them, "Come, and you will see." They see, and stay with him. One of them is Andrew, he tells his brother, Simon, "We have found the Messiah" (vv. 37-41). Andrew brings Simon to Jesus. Jesus says, "You are Simon, the son of John, you will be Cephas, which is translated Peter" (v. 42).

8. John's narrative is theological meaning. A key phrase is "Come and see" (v. 38, see also Jn.11:34). We must first come to Jesus to see, to know, who he is. To know him is not simply out of curiosity but to seek him as our Healer, Redeemer, and Savior. Come and see is a model for sharing our faith. We invite others into the experience of faith. We share the story of Jesus with them. And hopefully they will see, know, and follow Jesus.

9. John's narrative is quite different from the call of the first disciples in the Synoptic Gospels where Jesus calls them while they are either casting or preparing/cleaning their nets along the Sea of Galilee (see Mt. 4:18-22; Mk.1:16-20; Lk. 5:1-11). The theological intent of John makes the difference.

10. Prayer—O God, by your grace, we have seen Jesus as the Lamb of God, our Savior. We desire with all our heart to stay with him forever. Grant, we pray, that we may eagerly share our faith in Jesus, inviting others to come and see, and enter his presence. This we ask through the same Christ, your Son and our Lord. Amen.

"Making space"

Friday of the 1st week in OT, 12 Jan 2024, Mk 2:1-12

By BISHOP PABLO VIRGILIO DAVID

THE annual preparation for the ritual of the traslacion of the image of the Black Nazarene must be a nightmare for security people especially those in charge of crowd management. Have you ever wondered why, in spite of the millions of people who come for their annual devotion to the Nazareno, all wanting to come near to the image to have a glimpse of the "Poon" passing by or just to get their handkerchiefs to touch the image, we have so far avoided a stampede? Actually, the ritual has all the factors and elements present that could lead to a tragedy similar to what happened in Seoul, Korea two years ago now where hundreds of young people who were attending a Halloween party died of stampede.

Today's Gospel gives the answer to my question: MAKING SPACE. It is when people cannot make space for each other anymore

that a stampede in a crowded place is bound to happen. This is true, not just physically, but also spiritually—as in the attitude expressed silently by scribes in the Gospel story about the paralytic at Capernaum.

The creative way in which the four people had even been allowed to bore a hole in the roof to be able to bring in their paralytic friend near to Jesus is no different from what the Nazareno devotees do when they see some of their fellow devotees who seem more desperate about finding space near the image. They actually help each other. Even a centimeter of space would help. They are very much like the crabs that find their way out of the bucket.

I sympathize with these poor creatures which have been unfairly portrayed by some Filipinos. I mean those who apply what they call the expression "crab mentality" on those who tend to pull others down in order to reach the top. That unfair to the crabs! Why?

Because the crabs don't do that. They don't really pull each other down; they actually pull each other up. The ones below allow themselves to serve as a ladder for the ones above them so that these could get to the top and exit from the bucket. The last ones to cross over pull up the ones below—the real heroes who did not mind crossing over last, to get everybody out. Isn't this what happened with the passengers of that Japanese airline flight that collided against a smaller plane, who all survived miraculously?

The ones who could actually trigger a stampede in the Gospel story are the Scribes and Pharisees who are well-positioned already inside the house. They are the ones with an intolerant attitude, loaded with heavy loads of mental and spiritual baggage. They are the ones who react angrily when Jesus says to the paralytic, "My child, your sins are forgiven." Not only does Jesus make space for sinners; he forgives and heals them.

The scribes and Pharisees on the other hand, are not only reluctant about sharing space with sinners, they are also unable to make space in their minds and hearts to the idea that a sinner could get forgiven by anybody, other than God.

In the first reading, God tells Samuel not to take personally the clamor of the people for a king. He said to Samuel, "It's not you they reject; they are rejecting me as their king." They are making a mistake and even if all that the prophet could do was to warn them about their mistake, God could still make space for them. To make space even for people who might be wrong, is a big challenge that Jesus is posing on his disciples. It seems to be the same challenge Pope Francis is posing on us Catholics when he teaches us to widen the spaces of our tents and learn to treat every fellow human being as a fellow pilgrim in the common traslacion that we all must experience from the here and now to the hereafter.

Society of St. Pius X / B2

issue—tried to avert the schism. Summarizing then,

1) *The 4 bishops ordained by Abp. Lefebvre—including Abp. Lefebvre himself and another bishop who concelebrated that Episcopal consecration—were all excommunicated automatically* when they formally adhered to that schismatic act.

— Aside from the automatic excommunication, that excommunication was expressly declared by a *Decree of Excommunication* issued by the Sacred Congregation for Bishops on 1 July 1988, and confirmed by Pope John Paul II through the Apostolic Letter

Ecclesia Dei, issued *motu proprio* on 2 July 1988.

2) Aside from the aforementioned bishops, no other followers of Lefebvre were expressly excommunicated. However, as is true of any *automatic excommunication*, such expressed declaration of the penalty is not absolutely necessary—i.e., the penalty is *automatic* as soon as the crime is formally committed. Nevertheless, in a document of 26.VIII.1996, the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts (PCILT) clarified that the *automatic excommunication* affected clerics and lay people in the SSPX differently as regards their status:

1st *In the case of the deacons and priests, regardless of how they may present themselves in attire and manners, canonically they were considered under automatic excommunication.*

2nd *In the case of the other faithful, however, an occasional participation in liturgical acts or activities of the Lefebvrist Movement—done without identifying themselves with the doctrinal and disciplinary disunity of the movement with the Holy See—would not be sufficient to imply a formal adherence to the schism. Thus, the various situations should be judged in a case-to-case basis, in the competent seat of the external or internal forum. (To be concluded.)*

LISTEN ON 

We're here to answer your questions about life, faith, and love. We'll explore a variety of topics, including our purpose, how to grow in our faith, or even finding true love.

ang
daming
tanong
PODCAST

Bishops' Statements on Charter Change

The Vicar Apostolic of Taytay

Pahayag



isang constitutional assembly na ang dalawang kapulungan ng kongreso ay samasamang buboto. Babalewalain nito ang senado (mayroong 315 na house representatives at 24 lang na senators). May offer pa nga na magbayad para pupirma ang mga tao. Baka gamitin ang madaliang pagpapatawag ng Barangay Assembly para dito. Sabihin sa mga tao na huwag pumirma! Hindi ito inisyatiba na galing sa mga tao kundi ng ilang mga politico.

+BRODERICK S. PABILLO, D.D.
Apostolic Vicar
11 January 2024

MAYROONG isang hakbang na baguhin ang konstitusyon sa pamamagitan ng people's initiative na humihiling sa mga tao na lumagda sa isang petisyon upang bumuo ng

Roman Catholic Diocese of Dipolog

Sulat pamahayag ug pagpakabana gikan sa obispo ug kaparian sa Diosesis sa Dipolog

AKO, uban sa mga kaparian sa Diosesis sa Dipolog, mopadayag sa among pagpakabana mahitungod niining mosunod:

1. Ang nagbaga nga isyu sa atong nasud karon mahitungod sa People's Initiative; ang pag-usab sa atong Batakang Balaod.

2. Naay mga dapit sa atong probinsya diin gikataho nga nagpahigayon og signature campaign o pagpapirma alang sa maong tinguha diin ang katawhan gihaylo pinaagi sa paghatag og kwarta.

Tungod niini, tuguti kami nga mohatag sa among pipila ka mga tambag alang kaninyo:

A. Ang Batakang Balaod mao ang sukaranan sa mga prinsipyo o natukod nga mga sumbanaan kung diin ang usa ka nasud giila sa iyang pagdumala. Sa laktud, dili kini angay dali-on sa pag-usab.

B. Ang People's Initiative nga dili gikan sa makinaadmanon nga pamalandong ug tinuod nga panginahanglan sa katawhan modala lamang sa pag-usab nga pabor sa mga pipila lamang.

C. Ang Batakang Balaod sa

Pilipinas gibuhisan kini sa kinabuhi ug dugo; ang kausaban niini, kung gikinahanglan, dili unta pinaagi sa paghaylo sa pipila ka pesos aron mapasayon apan diha sa pagpasabot ug tinud-anay nga konsultasyon.

Busa, inubanan sa Batakang Balaod Pastoral sa Atong Simbahan (Gaudium Et Spes), kami nagpahimangno kaninyo: "Wala'y labing maayo nga paagi aron matukod ang politikanhon nga kinabuhi sa tawo kundili pinaagi sa pag-amuma og lawom nga panglantaw sa hustisya ug pagkamabination, lakip na ang pagserbisyo sa kaayohan sa kadaghanan; pinaagi sa paglig-on sa mga batakang baroganan bahin sa tinuod nga kinaiya sa politikanhon nga katilingban, nga ang tinguha niini mao ang hustong paggamit ug malangkubon nga panabot kun unsa ang pangagamhanan. (Gaudium Et Spes, Art. 73, par. 5)"

Nanghinaut kami nga kita magiyahan ug mainampingon sa kaugmaon sa atong nasud pinaagi sa pagpakabana. Dili unta kita mahaylo sa salapi ug dili pud unta



kita madali-dalion sa atong mga desisyon. Apan gikinahanglan nato nga aktibo nga partisipasyon ug diskusyon aron kita magiyahan ug makat-on.

Uban sa pag-ampo nga hatagan unta kita sa Ginoo sa grasya nga atong gitinguha ug buligan unta ang atong mga paningkamot (Salmo 19:17).

Benedicam Dominum semper,

+SEVERO C. CAERMARE, D.D.
January 13, 2024

The Roman Catholic Prelature of Batanes

Pastoral Letter from the Bishop and the Clergy of Batanes on Charter Change

DEAR People of God in Batanes,

We have received reports from concerned parishioners here in our prelatore that there is an on-going effort to gather signatures from us while the issue on Constitutional or Charter Change is presently talked about because of a plan by congress to discuss this matter. Based from the testimony of those who have personally seen and experienced it with some proofs to back up their claims and convinced of the veracity of what they have revealed to us, we therefore conclude that the manner of gathering signatures is IRREGULAR and ANOMALOUS. Hence, we your pastors and shepherds, the bishop, together with all the clergy in fulfillment of our duty, come to you to express our disappointment and indignation over this recent development happening in our prelatore. These are the reasons why we are convinced that the manner on how they gather signatures is QUESTIONABLE and UNACCEPTABLE:

1) There is a clear attempt to railroad the process of signature-gathering by doing it hastily without due regard for our people to be well informed and enlightened first about it. It appears that there is no public forum being conducted first in order to have a public consultation and extensive discussion with the general public before getting the signatures of our people. Failure to do so deprives us of our right to be informed sufficiently and enlightened well before affixing our signatures as a proof that we fully understand what we are signing for.

2) The timing of getting signatures is improper and unacceptable to say the least. We were told that on some occasions, our people who were asked to affix their signatures, do sign their names while being given government financial assistance. From all indications, these simultaneous acts of getting signatures and giving government financial assistance at the same time has the appearance of a bribery whether directly or indirectly. It is also a form of pressure and indirect corruption brazenly committed right before our eyes. In view of all of these, we call on all concerned to ask you to respect a process like a People's Initiative to make amendments to our constitution. Our participation in this political exercise, which gives us the right to approve of this process with our signatures must be done morally, properly and legally. Anything contrary to these is deemed unacceptable and unforgivable because it goes against the norms of the church and against the will of God aside from violating the norms of human law.

We, your bishop and all priests who are your servant-leaders, would like therefore to call out all our partners in government who are themselves considered public servants. We want you to know that we desire to continue our partnership and collaboration with you in carrying out our common task



of looking after the general welfare of our people. Let all our actions be done always rightly, legally and according to our Christian and Catholic principles that include honesty, fraternal charity and humility among other values that a Christian and a Catholic stands for. We your partners in the church are ready to have a dialogue with you at a convenient time that may be mutually acceptable in order to give more time for us to talk and exchange views regarding charter change. Feel free to inform us of your suggestions.

In the meantime, we appeal to all of you to remain vigilant and alert for any attempt to unwittingly use our right to approve a people's initiative through our signatures for self-serving interests. Your cooperation to those who seek to undermine the integrity of your signature, whether done through some pressure or bribery, is still unacceptable and likewise deserves our indignation of such action because we deem it anti-Christian and anti-Catholic.

We continue to observe and watch the development of this matter in our prelatore and we shall reserve the right to come out with another Pastoral letter if necessary to talk about the same issue or anything that affects our people's welfare.

May God, who expects much from us to whom much is given, bestow on us the grace to continue our aspirations and dream as one people in our beloved prelatore and province of Batanes who are God-fearing, upright and law-abiding citizens of our province and true Christians and Catholics in the church.

We also seek the intercession of the Blessed Mother of God, Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, Patroness of Batanes, to help us attain our dream by accompanying and guiding us always in all our endeavors as one people.

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

MOST REV. DANILO B. ULEP, D.D.
Rev. Fr. Ronaldo B. Manabat
Rev. Fr. John B. Capindo
Rev. Fr. Edilberto B. Concordia
Rev. Fr. Danilo T. Cruz
Rev. Fr. Johnmar A. Marfe
Rev. Fr. Demetrio DS. Quintos
Rev. Fr. Roland Pops A. Gohetia
Rev. Fr. Andres Algerico P. Gonzales
Rev. Fr. Joel B. Padua
Rev. Fr. Benigno B. Etulle

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Legazpi

Pahayag



NAMOMOTAN na Banwaan nin Dios:

Nakaabot samo an mga report nin pagpapapirma sa mga botante

sa ngaran kuno nin People's Initiative para amyendahan an Constitucion.

Makaduda ini nin huli ta pighihidali asin daing maigot na informacion o pagpasabot sa katuyuhan asin consecuencia kaini sa futuro kan satong banwaan. Makamundo man na maisihan na may kaibang barakalan nin pirma gamit an kwarta asin ayuda hale sa gobyerno.

Bako tama na gamiton an pagtios nin tawo para ibusol an interes nin mga makapangyarihan. Bako tama na gamiton an mekanismo nin People's Initiative kun ini bako kabotan talaga nin mga

ciudadano kundi nin nagkapira saná.

Sa satong mga kahimanwa: Mag-ingat kita. Dai basang sana na magpirma, kundi paorogón an kunsensya.

Sa mga nasa autoridad: Bantayan asin dai pagkunsintihon an mga paglabag sa batas sa pagconducir kaining People's Initiative kuno.

Magpamibi kita na dai madaog nin tentacion nin kwarta, pabor, o kapangyarihan; asin na gibohon an tama asin matanos para sa satong kapwa asin banwaan.

+JOEL Z. BAYLON, D.D.
Obispo kan Legazpi
13 Enero 2024

Roman Catholic Bishop of Boac

MINAMAHAL naming Bayan ng Diyos!

Malinaw na may mga hakbang na pong nangyayari sa ating mga barangay kung saan hinihingi ang inyong mga lagda para sa sinasabing "Constitutional Assembly" kung saan ay ninanais ng ilang politikong baguhin ang kasalukuyang Saligang Batas ng ating bansa. Agaran nilang sinisisi ang Saligang Batas ng 1987 para sa mga sinasabing problema ng ating bayan. Kaya nga't kaagaran din nilang sinasabi na dapat na itong baguhin para magkaroon ng tunay na kaunlaran sa ating bansa.

Huwag po tayong basta lalagda sa mga petisyong ito sapagkat ito ay isang madaliang pagtutulak para maisagawa ang sinasabing Charter Change o pagbabago sa Saligang Batas na hindi nagbibigay puwang sa isang masusing pag-aaral at isang malayang diskusyon sa pangangailangan nito at mga tunay na dahilan sa likod ng mga sinasabing problema ng ating bansa.

Hayaan ninyong bigyan naming kayo ng ilang dahilan kung bakit hindi dapat tayo lumagda sa mga petisyong ito:

Hindi ang ating kasalukuyang Saligang Batas ang problema. At kung ating tunay na pag-iisipan alam natin na ang Sistema ng

Politika at Korupsyon ang tunay na problema, kaya nga't ang pagbabago o pag-aamyenda ng kasalukuyang Saligang Batas ay magiging daan lamang ng mas pagpapatibay sa mga sistema at gawi ng korupsyon na ito.

Walang kahit anong pagbabago ng Saligang Batas ang magbibigay solusyon sa ating mga problema at mag-aahon sa atin sa kahirapan hangga't hindi nagbabago ang maling kultura at ugali ng mga nais magbalangkas ng mga batas at ganun din ng mga nagpapatupad nito.

Ang isinusulong na paraan ng petisyong ito ay ang "Constitutional Assembly" kung saan ang dalawang kapulungan ng kongreso ay pag-iisahin na lamang, kaya nga't ang senado na kumakatawan sa karamihan sa atin, ay mababalewala na lamang sa sistemang ito. Hindi ninyo ba naisip na ang tinatawag nila na "INISYATIBA" ng mga tao ay hindi galing sa mga tao kungdi ay isinusulong ng ilang mga politiko? Bakit po mga opisyal ng barangay o mga dating opisyal ng barangay ang nagpapaikot ng mga lalagdaang mga papel? At hindi ba mas kaduda-duda nga kung may alok na bayad para lamang lumagda tayo?

Ang kasalukuyan nating Saligang Batas, sang-ayon na rin sa Kagalang-galang na Hilario Davide Jr. (ika-20 Punong Hukom



ng Korte Suprema), "... ay ang natatanging Saligang Batas na maka-Diyos, maka-Pilipino, maka-Tao, maka-Dukha, maka-Buhay, maka-Pamilya, maka-Kasal, maka-Karapatang Pantao, maka-Kababaihan, at maka-Kalikasan..."

Ang amin pong dasal ay hindi tayo basta lalagda sa kahit anong petisyon na hindi muna nating napag-isipan, napag-usapan at napag-dasalan. Huwag po sana nating hayaang magpatuloy ang ganitong mga sistema ng panlilinlang sa ating mga mamamayan na siyang mas nagpapalakas ng loob sa mga nananamantala sa ating bayan. Pagpalain nawa tayong lagi at gabayan ng ating Poong Maykapal!

+MARCELINO ANTONIO M. MARALIT JR., D.D.
Obispo ng Diyosesis ng Boac
January 12, 2024



Members of the Hijos del Nazareno prepare the image of the Black Nazarene at the Quirino Grandstand before transporting it to the andas or carriage, which will then carry it through the streets of Manila.

IN PHOTOS:

Black Nazarene draws millions in first *Traslacion* since the pandemic

Photos by JOSE SANTOS AND ROY LAGARDE

Marking a triumphant comeback from the three-year hiatus induced by the Covid-19 pandemic, this year's *Traslacion* of the Black Nazarene in Manila witnessed an awe-inspiring sea of devotees, as millions joined the procession in a powerful display of faith and resilience.

These photos encapsulate the profound spiritual journey that unfolded during the Feast of the Black Nazarene last January 9, 2024.



The image of the Black Nazarene inches across the Ayala Bridge.



The image of the Black Nazarene proceeds along F.R. Hidalgo Street toward the Minor Basilica of San Sebastian for the historic *Dungaw*.



Millions of devotees endure the elements and exhaustion in prayerful devotion to the Black Nazarene during the return of the *Traslacion*.



Thousands of devotees join the *Misa Mayor* presided over by Cardinal Jose Advincula at the Quirino Grandstand in Manila.