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Issue 37

ENDING WAR BUILDING PEACE IN ASIA



ENDING WAR, BUILDING PEACE IN ASIA

From Solidarity to Peace: A Journey of Hope

A Journey of Hope In our last issue, *Solidarity with the Poor: The Silent Rise of Hope*, we reflected on democracy in Asia and the vital role of youth. We witnessed how hope emerges not from abstractions but from the resilience of communities—indigenous youth rebuilding after floods, young leaders confronting corruption, and institutions embodying faith in action. The theological reflections of Fr. Aloysius Pieris, SJ, and Dr. Paul Hwang reminded us that poverty and struggle are not obstacles but places where God reveals His mercy. That issue challenged us to see solidarity not as a slogan but as a lived practice, and to recognize the poor as the living revelation of hope.

“Stop the War – Peace in the World,” echoes a growing concern shared across the region. As reflected in the voices of young people like Joe Ashwin from India, the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East are not distant events; they deeply affect everyday life in Asia. Rising fuel costs, food insecurity, unemployment, and disruptions in education are realities that weigh heavily on ordinary families. The youth remind us that war fractures not only nations but also the fragile dignity of daily living. Their call is simple yet profound: that people everywhere—especially the younger generation—must come together to reject violence and stand for peace.

This issue also brings us into the heart of reflection through our Theology & Spirituality section. Drawing from the rich legacy of the Second Vatican Council, we revisit the “waves of renewal” in mission theology. As presented by Fr. James Kroeger MM, the Church’s mission in Asia continues to unfold as a living journey—one that embraces dialogue, justice, and integral evangelization. This vision reminds us that faith is not separate from life; it is expressed through witness, service, and a deep respect for cultures and human freedom.

At the same time, this issue places stronger emphasis on the concrete life of our partner communities. Through the updates of organizations such as MAP, IMCS, IRDS, WTI, and ACEC, we see how solidarity becomes action—through education, community development, and accompaniment of the marginalized. These lived experiences ground our reflections, showing that hope is sustained not only by ideas, but by committed people working quietly and faithfully.

In the Message for the Month, Dr. Paul Hwang speaks with urgency about the devastating violence in Gaza and its far-reaching consequences for Asia. He challenges us to confront the moral weight of war, where human dignity is stripped away and the poor suffer most. Yet even amid this darkness, he points to courageous voices—such as Pope Leo XIV and Lee Jae-myung—who call for peace grounded in universal human rights. Their witness reminds us that truth and courage still have the power to awaken conscience and inspire change.

As we journey from solidarity with the poor toward a collective cry for peace, this issue invites us to listen more deeply, to care more intentionally, and to act more courageously. Peace is not distant—it begins in how we respond to suffering, how we uphold dignity, and how we choose compassion over indifference.

May this issue encourage each of us to walk with others, to hear the voices of youth, and to become, in our own small ways, builders of peace in our communities and beyond.

—Editor’s Note

Maverick Joniah

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STOP THE WAR - PEACE IN THE WORLD

Joe Ashwin - IRDS-India

AYA/ATF Alumni 2024

The present war between the US–Israel alliance and Iran in the Middle East is creating innumerable problems for people all over the world and is destroying the organic relationship between human beings and nature. Across the media in our region, the ongoing war in the Middle East has become the main issue discussed and broadcast, which is horrifying to watch and read about.

To better understand the seriousness of this crisis, I would like to explain the situation through the realities we are currently experiencing in India.

Since the beginning of this war, fuel costs—such as LPG, petrol, and diesel—have increased significantly, and we are also experiencing fuel shortages across our region. As a result, ordinary people face growing difficulties in their daily lives. Even daily wage earners find it hard to obtain fuel to go to work, leading to increased unemployment. Likewise, families that depend on LPG for daily cooking are struggling to prepare their meals.

Because of these shortages, many schools and colleges have been shut down, and student hostels have been closed, greatly disrupting the education of children and young people.

Furthermore, hotels and restaurants in many locations are closing due to LPG shortages. This situation has caused food



The photo above captures one of IRDS's activities with a partner local community in Tamil Nadu, India.

prices to rise, forcing many workers and people in other regions to go to sleep without food. As employment opportunities decline, many workers are losing their jobs, leaving families without income and basic necessities. Parents are compelled to withdraw their children from school, creating uncertainty and a dark future for the younger generation.

At the same time, garment factories and many small industries across our regions are shutting down daily, creating deep uncertainty about the future of both industries and workers. If this situation continues, there is growing fear of a complete lockdown across our regions, increasing anxiety and insecurity among the people. These developments reflect the harsh daily realities faced in our area.

While these consequences are felt far from the battlefield, the suffering is even greater in regions where the war continues directly. Deaths, hunger, poverty, and homelessness are increasing, and families do not know where to with their children in search of safety.

To better understand the seriousness of this crisis, I would like to explain the situation through the realities we are currently experiencing in India.

Beyond human suffering, war also brings serious environmental consequences. Carbon emissions caused by war not only affect people living in conflict zones but also threaten the sustainable future of humanity and nature as a whole.

In this situation, there is an urgent need for people all over the world to launch campaigns against this war. Already, in many cities in the United States and Europe, people are marching in the streets calling for an end to the war. In the same spirit, people across the world must organize themselves to launch a global campaign against war.

Alongside this, there is a pressing need to promote a worldwide disarmament movement, which alone can ensure a sustainable future for humanity and nature. At present, however, governments across the globe continue to prioritize the production of arms. Every year, a significant portion of national budgets is allocated to military and arms production.

These budgets, funded by the taxes of ordinary people, fail to adequately address essential human needs such as education, health care, agriculture, and livelihoods. Instead, they support the profit-making interests of large arms-producing companies. In this context, destructive wars are sustained and justified, threatening the very existence of humanity and nature.



Photo taken during AYA/ATF 2024 Tagaytay: Joe Ashwin- India | AYA/ATF Alumni 2024

Therefore, all peace-loving people across the world must immediately come together to stop this war and promote peace throughout the world. The younger generation across the globe must unite and collectively raise our voice:

“Stop the War — Peace in the World.”

WAVES OF RENEWAL IN MISSION THEOLOGY INSIGHTS IN THE VATICAN II ERA (A SUMMARY)

Fr. James Kroeger MM



In the Asian context, the theology and praxis of mission and evangelization have experienced genuine renewal in the fifty years since the opening of the Second Vatican Council, convened by Saint John XXIII and celebrated in its golden anniversary in 2012 as a significant milestone for the Church. Reflecting on this period (1962–2012), the Church asks how Vatican II has been received, understood as the process by which the Christian community acknowledges, accepts, and integrates the Council's teachings and vision. It raises questions about whether Catholics, especially missionaries and religious, have personally appropriated this vision, experienced transformation in attitudes, beliefs, and behavior, and how future challenges may be addressed, recognizing that the full reception of Vatican II is still unfolding. The Spirit-inspired renewal of Vatican II is described as coming in "waves," gradual yet continuous movements shaping the Church's life and mission, particularly within the Asian context.

Within this renewal, evangelization is understood in an integral manner. In his message for World Mission Day in October 2011, Pope Benedict XVI affirmed that the Church has the urgent duty to proclaim the Gospel, noting that the mission of Christ entrusted to the Church "is still far from being accomplished" (RM 1). The universal mission of evangelization involves all people, everywhere, and always.

Although the term evangelization was once unfamiliar to many Catholics, the Vatican II and recent popes placed it at the center of the Church's identity, showing it as a holistic mission involving bishops, priests, laity, and the whole People of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit. Pope Paul VI, in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, described evangelization as bringing the Good News into all strata of humanity and engaging cultures, hopes, and struggles. Pope John Paul II continued this missionary vision, calling the whole Church to renewed enthusiasm and commitment to evangelization.

The Church recognizes five principal elements of evangelization: witness of life, commitment to human development, interreligious dialogue, explicit proclamation and catechesis, and prayer and sacramental life. This integral view ensures clarity, insight, and proper integration in the Church's mission. Christian witness begins through authentic daily living and leads to service for justice, human development, peace-building, and care for creation.

In Asia, evangelization includes dialogue with diverse religions and cultures, while proclamation and catechesis openly share Christ and deepen faith. Integral evangelization is sustained by holiness and prayer. All its dimensions complement one another, since the Church's mission is one and indivisible, unified in bringing people to encounter Christ and share in God's Kingdom.

This renewed understanding also deepens reflection on the universal availability of salvation. Vatican II reaffirmed that salvation is open to all people, including those outside explicit Christian faith, because God desires everyone to be saved. The pivotal word here is available: salvation is offered to all through God's grace, yet it is not automatic, since human freedom, conscience, and cooperation remain necessary. This affirmation does not diminish the urgency of mission but rather deepens its meaning.

From this theological vision flows the renewed awareness that the Church is missionary by her very nature. Vatican II declared that the pilgrim Church originates from the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit according to the Father's will. Mission belongs to the Church's deepest identity and participation in God's own mission (*missio Dei*). The Church exists in order to evangelize, not as one activity among many but as her defining reality. This missionary identity is lived concretely in local Churches, which Vatican II recognized as fully sharing responsibility for the universal mission. The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences promotes a "new way of being Church," encouraging local communities authentically rooted in Asian cultures while remaining in communion with the universal Church.

The renewal of mission further calls Christians to unity. Divisions among Christians weaken Gospel witness, and both Paul VI and John Paul II emphasized ecumenism as an instrument of evangelization. In Asia, where Christians are often a minority, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue becomes not optional but a true vocation of the Church.

Closely connected to the development of local Churches is the imperative of inculturation. Emerging in the Church's vocabulary in the post-Vatican II period, inculturation expresses the effort to reformulate and integrate Christian life and doctrine within the thought-patterns of each people.

Paul VI noted that: evangelization must reach cultures in a vital and profound way, touching their deepest roots rather than remaining superficial. While this task encounters challenges due to the diversity and fluidity of cultures, the Church—faithful to her tradition and universal mission—can enter into communion with different cultural expressions for mutual enrichment. This wave of mission renewal vigorously promotes evangelization deeply rooted in people's lives and values.

Related to an appreciation of culture, The evangelizing Church must pay attention to key shapers of culture, especially modern social communication media. Vatican II recognized the importance of social communication, and Paul VI highlighted the immense influence of mass media, which serve as a contemporary pulpit for evangelization when placed at the service of the Gospel. While John Paul II, further explained that evangelization is not just using media, but also integrating the Gospel into the new culture created by communication, using updated language and methods suited to modern society.

This missionary renewal also affirms the full participation of the laity. One could assert that the Church's mission of evangelization is too important to be left to the clergy and religious alone; Vatican II emphasizes the missionary nature of the entire Church. Every baptized member—layperson, ordained, or religious—is equally an evangelizer, engaged in an integral vision of evangelization that involves all states of life, all local Churches, and all forms of witness. The lay faithful, prepared through the sacraments and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, share both the right and

duty of mission, not a delegation from clergy but by grace and vocation. This wave of renewal is still not fully recognized; it offers great potential for the Church.

Indeed, an older vision of mission and evangelization often saw that mission responsibility was the special concern of priests, sisters, or missionary orders. Vatican II clarified that the pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature and that evangelization is a basic duty of the entire People of God, calling everyone—bishops, priests, religious, laity, and youth—to share responsibility in missionary work among the nations.

For Paul VI "it is the whole Church that receives the mission to evangelize, and the work of each individual member is important for the whole." *Evangelii Nuntiandi* highlights the diverse workers for evangelization, affirming that mission belongs to the universal Church, local Churches, Church leadership, religious, laity, families, and young people, all exercising diversified ministries in service of missionary evangelization. John Paul II likewise highlights missionaries, clergy, religious, catechists, and Pontifical Mission Societies, stressing that "all Christians share responsibility for missionary activity" (RM 77). Ecclesial life in Asia continues to recognize the contributions of missionaries throughout history while encouraging local Churches themselves to become missionary-sending communities.

Within this shared mission, religious life retains an inherently missionary character. Regarding religious life, the Second Vatican Council noted in *Perfectae Caritatis* that apostolic and charitable activity belongs to the very nature of religious life, requiring that the whole life of religious be inspired by an apostolic spirit, while recognizing the continuing need for renewal so that priests and religious see themselves not only in a pastoral role but as missionaries.

A key part of the missionary identity of religious life is a deep engagement with the Church's social teaching. Vatican II calls for attention to the common good and active participation in social life so that society serves the human person (GS 26). Paul VI teaches that while the Church connects human development with salvation in Christ, they are not the same, and true renewal requires both just structures and conversion of the human heart. John Paul II emphasizes that evangelization includes integral human development and liberation from oppression, rooted in deeper evangelization, with the human person as the main agent of development. In the Asian context, Church social teaching is seen as essential guidance for reflection and action, calling the faithful in religious life to integrate it fully into their evangelizing mission as an essential dimension of mission in Asia.

A particularly significant renewal after Vatican II has been the Church's commitment to interreligious dialogue. The Second Vatican Council, through *Nostra Aetate*, affirmed that the Catholic Church "rejects nothing which is true and holy" in other religions and encouraged dialogue and collaboration while witnessing to Christian faith and life (NA 2). Popes Paul VI and John Paul II emphasized that proclamation and interfaith dialogue are not opposed. Paul VI reaffirmed respect for other religions while maintaining the proclamation of Jesus Christ (EN 53).

In Asia, where Christians are a small minority, the Church actively promotes dialogue grounded in the logic of the Incarnation (EA 29), encouraging models of "evangelization in dialogue and dialogue for evangelization" with proper formation (EA 31). Asian bishops describe dialogue as the distinctive mode of mission, calling the Church to live in continuous, humble, and loving dialogue with cultures and religions (FABC I:12; V:4.1).

Underlying all these developments is a renewed mission theology grounded in Christology, Kingdom theology, Pneumatology, catholicity, the paschal mystery, and the trinity of God. Vatican II

emphasized the centrality of Christ, linking its teachings to tradition through resourcement and biblical language, recognizing a "hierarchy of truths" with Christ at the highest level (UR 11). Paul VI stated: "There can be no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed" (EN 22). John Paul II affirmed that Christ's mystery "lies at the heart of the Church's mission and life" (RM 44). The Church in Asia highlights bearing witness to Jesus Christ as the supreme service, responding to the longing for the Absolute and ensuring integral human development (Ecclesia in Asia 20), continuing Christ's mission so that all Asians "may have life and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10; EA 50).

Pneumatology has prospered post-Council. Paul VI called the Holy Spirit "the principal agent of evangelization" (EN 75), and John Paul II devoted a chapter of *Redemptoris Missio* (21-30) to the Spirit's role in mission. Catholics "ought to believe that the Holy Spirit...offers everyone the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery" (GS 22; RM 6, 10, 28). These foundations hold great potential to transform Christians and local Churches.

Vatican II's reflection on religious freedom grounds evangelization. *Dignitatis Humanae* affirms the "free exercise of religion in society" (DH 1), encouraging conscience-guided choices without coercion. Paul VI emphasized clarity and respect for freedom in presenting the Gospel, without coercion or unworthy pressure (EN 80), and similarly, John Paul II stated: "Her mission does not restrict freedom but promotes it... She respects individuals and cultures, and honors the sanctuary of conscience" (RM 39).

The Church in Asia calls on governments to recognize religious freedom as a fundamental right, ensuring no one is forced against conscience and all may act freely, alone or with others, within due limits (EA 23).

The vision of Vatican II ultimately presents a paradigm of a missionary Church for the modern world. Pope Benedict XVI, on April 20, 2005, recalled the Second Vatican Council and affirmed its importance for the renewal of the Church and her mission, describing the Council as a "compass" guiding the Church in the third millennium and confirming his determination to continue to put the Second Vatican Council into practice, which remain timely and relevant in a globalized society (OR-EE, 27-04-05, p. 3).

Pope John XXIII called the Church to read "the signs of the times," asking for a "new Pentecost" and renewed missionary spirit. Pope Paul VI later observed: "One may say that the Council leaves itself as a legacy to the Church that held it," insisting that "the first need of the Church is to always live Pentecost."

In 1975 Paul VI issued *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Gaudete in Domino*, emphasizing that the Gospel will not be heard if it is not proclaimed by joyful evangelizers. Joy and hope are essential for effective evangelization; the world receives the Good News from ministers "whose lives glow with fervor," who have received the joy of Christ and are ready to risk their lives for the Kingdom (EN 80).

The success of evangelization requires "renewed evangelizers." Pierre Teilhard de Chardin wrote: "Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God." Joy evangelizes and sustains believers transformed by an encounter with the Risen Lord. Thus, the Church continually hears Saint Paul's exhortation: "Rejoice in the Lord always... The Lord is near" (Gal 4:4), calling all to be transformed by Christian joy.

ASIAN CATHOLIC EVANGELIZATION CENTER (ACEC)

JANUARY TO MARCH 2026



JIK-AM MISSION SUPPORT ASSOCIATION 19TH ANNIVERSARY SYNOD SPIRITUALITY RETREAT

- Theme: "And they departed for their country by another way" (Matthew 2:12)
- Speaker: Fr. Yang Seung-kook, SDB (Salesians of Don Bosco)
- Date: Sunday, March 1st
- Venue: 2nd Floor Auditorium, Suwon Diocesan Curia

ASIA EVANGELIZATION ACADEMY – THEMATIC LECTURES

The Asia Evangelization Academy conducted a series of thematic lectures throughout March at Conference Room 4 of the Suwon Diocesan Curia.

On March 5, Dr. Hwang Kyung-hoon (Asia Lay Leaders Forum) presented on Dialogue between Asian Cultures and Christianity as part of the Asia Evangelization Research presentation.

On March 12, Dr. Dong Sun-hee (Asian Catholic Evangelization Center) delivered a lecture on the History of Japanese Kirishitan under the theme of Japanese Culture and Evangelization.

The Overseas Missionary Experience Sharing sessions followed, with Fr. Kim Min-jo Hasang Paul (Clerical Congregation of the Blessed Korean Martyrs) sharing Stories of Mission in Timor-Leste on March 19, and Fr. Lee Ho-yeol Simon, SDB (Salesians of Don Bosco), presenting on Nomadic Culture, Farming Culture, and Faith on March 26.

11TH ASIA EVANGELIZATION RESEARCH SEMINAR (ZOOM MEETING)

- East Asia Research Group Presentation
- Date & Time: Sunday, March 22nd, 20:00–22:00
- Subject: A Study on the Acceptance and Conflict of Christianity in East Asia: Focusing on the Reception of Catholicism in China and Korea
- Presenter: Lee Eun-kyung (Institute for the Evangelization of Asia)



CELEBRATING THE JOYS-SORROWS OF LIJIANG IN THE LIGHT OF HOLY WEEK

Fr. Jojo M. Fung SJ - April 12, 2026.

My sojourn in Lijiang, Yunnan, Southern China, from March 24 till May 6, 2026, has led me, a Malaysian overseas Chinese and a disciple of Jesus, to a deepening of my personal experience of a profound sense of humility and gratitude in this 5000 year old ancient civilization of China, and the ancestral homeland of the Chang, Nu, Lisu, Bai, Naxi, Miao indigenous communities out of the 25 tribes (the Han Chinese is counted as the 26th tribe) in Yunnan. This ancient civilization dates back to the Kunlun Era that boasts of an earliest matrilineal society. From this Kun Lun Era, the inhabitants of the Central Plain of Hebei, Henan, Kwantung, the Zun Hua People, from whom all the 26 tribes of China descended and migrated south to Sichuan and Yunnan as a result of inter-community-conflict.

My ancestors in China are the Hakka people. These ancestors counted amongst the southward migratory people as they arrived in Guangdong and then Yunnan provinces. Most delightful of all, my Hakka ancestors arrived in Yunnan, intermarried with the Bai and the Miao indigenous peoples, to the extent that there is a Bai indigenous community that bears my Fung/Hong family surname, located in Sin Tuan Sin district, namely in the adjacent villages of Fung Jia and Sou Sin. The Fung Clan built a Buddhist Temple known as the Tung San Miao or East Mountain Temple in the Fung Jia Village in honor of our ancestor Chu Yuan Chuan and the Goddess Guan Yin. This temple truly marked the Fung collective migratory memory of moving South to Yunnan

and from the former kingdom of Dali to Lijiang.

As Holy Week approached, I was praying to understand the meaning of Holy Week for a sojourner like me who is at the same time the son of Inigo (St. Ignatius of Loyola), related to a honorable Jesuit ancestor known in the Universal Church as a pioneer of inculturation in China by the name of Mateo Ricci SJ.

Come Holy Thursday, April 2, 2026, I experienced the graces of humility, awakening to a deeper mind-heart-fulness that in this ancient homeland, Christianity is just a drop of water in the civilizational ocean of China/Asia in which all of us are regarded as the elegant lotuses. We need to build a "common fraternity" with the Buddhists, the Hindus and the Muslim majority, including the minority indigenous peoples of the primal religions in Asia.

On Good Friday, April 3, 2026, I experienced the graces of total self-giving in terms of 100/100% in my preferential option/solidarity with the indigenous communities and the wounded Earth. I was inspired and humbled by a 85 year local medical doctor, Mr. Mu Ban who gave himself totally his whole to the healing of the sick horses, cows, pigs, dogs & cats in the Junliang village of his Naxi tribal village in the Laxi district, Lijiang, Yunnan.

On Easter Saturday, April 4, 2026, I experienced the graces of Communion with the Goddess Quan Yin, Ancestor Chu Yuan Chang in the Tung San Miao (East Mountain

Temple) and the Fung Clan of the Bai indigenous Communities as they celebrated "Qingming" in honor of the ancestors & the dead. Contemplating on the divine resurrectonal power that raised Jesus from the dead, leaving the tomb emptied of a corpse, I was struck by the resurrectonal power in Jesus which breaks me/us/earth/cosmos free of all constraints, doubts, fears, oppression. Just when I hesitated whether I should light the joss-sticks/incense, kneel before the Goddess Guan Yin and the venerable Ancestor Chu Yuan Chang, the Risen Lord breaks me free of my hesitation, and I found myself kneeling before them, rendering to them and the Creator-Sustainer-God my utmost praise and gratitude for leading me to cross this religiocultural threshold which my Jesuit ancestors et al, Mateo Ricci has crossed centuries before me.

On Easter Sunday, April 4, 2026, when the Church Universal celebrated Mary Magalene and the apostles' visit to the empty tomb, God's Spirit led me to deepen my Easter-experience of "Qingming" by an onsite ancestral rite at the cemetery of Prof He Jin Song who is a Naxi intellectual at the Yunnan Academy of Social sciences. I joined his extended family to cleared the undergrowth around the tombs in three separate sites. After the clearing, incense, flowers, willow leaves, wine and home-cooked food were offered first to the Spirit of the mountain/land/Earth, led by an elder, culminating in deep bow on our knees & 3 kow-tow, with our forehead touching Mother Earth, signifying that the earth is part of us and we are part of the earth.

I came away from my experience of living the Naxi homeland in Lijaiing with a deep sense that the Resurrection is an everyday experience amidst the Buddhist communities of the Naxi indigenous communities in Yunnan, Southern Yunnan. This divine and sacred experience of the Resurrection led me to a deep experience, fully convinced that the Triune God overflows the liturgical celebration of Christianity in the churches, criss-crosses and shatters all the religiocultural boundaries. In this way, I find myself celebrating and rejoicing in the cosmic presence of the Triune God who has become one with our Cosmos and Earth through the incarnation, becoming a local Nazarene in the Middle East. Yet, at the resurrection, the local Nazarene breaks out of the local Nazarene Jesus, becomes a cosmic Christ, rendering the experience of the God of creation possible. In this way, the Creator-Sustainer-God, the Risen Lord and God's Spirit, are truly in all, over all, through all and all in all.

INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY (IRDS) ACTIVITIES

JANUARY TO MARCH 2026



Pongal 2026: A Harvest Celebration with IRDS

From 14–18 January, IRDS celebrated Pongal, the traditional harvest festival, together with communities across the region. In its target villages, the celebration

brought together many young people and women, highlighting the importance of strengthening relationships with nature. The festival also served as an opportunity to emphasize the need to ensure a life of dignity and equality for all, while raising awareness about the growing challenges of climate change.

In the coming weeks, IRDS plans to organize a youth training program that will engage young people in land-related activities, particularly in the protection and promotion of lands and commons in their respective villages. The initiative also aims to support youth in exploring livelihood opportunities by making use of available local resources and applying their educational skills.

IRDS Hosts VIT University Students for Rural Camp

The Rural Camp for M.A. Social Work students from the Vellore Institute of Technology was successfully conducted in collaboration with IRDS. The group consisted of 28 students—11 women and 17



men—accompanied by three professors, including two women and one male faculty member. The participants arrived on 16 February and stayed until 21 February. During the camp, the students focused their activities in two villages, Veerasoshapuram and Puthur, where they engaged with school children and local communities through cultural programs and discussions. These activities highlighted important themes such as climate action—particularly the protection and promotion of lands and commons through the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA)—as well as gender equality at all levels.

The School Development Committees, teachers, and Village Panchayat members in both villages extended strong support to the students throughout the program. As part of their environmental initiative, the students also planted traditional trees in local schools to promote a more eco-friendly and sustainable future for the villages.

Several members of the IRDS team accompanied the students during their activities. Each evening, the students and the IRDS team held reflection and discussion sessions to share experiences and insights from the day's engagements.

Rights, Justice, Action: IRDS Marks International Women's Day with Women from Villages

On 8 March, IRDS organized a celebration of International Women's Day at its center in Villupuram. The event gathered 85 participants from 36 villages, along with IRDS team members. Among the participants were around 10 elderly women, while the rest were between 20 and 45 years old.

Guided by this year's theme, "Rights, Justice, Action for All Women and Girls," the participants engaged in meaningful discussions and arrived at several concrete decisions. Key issues highlighted included the need for equal wages for women across all sectors, securing land rights for women in villages, and creating local employment opportunities for women's collectives. They also emphasized the importance of ensuring the



education of girl children by accessing schemes from the Labor Welfare Board and utilizing budget allocations for Dalits under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Sub Plan.

Participants also stressed the importance of protecting and promoting lands and commons through the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA), along with strengthening climate action initiatives involving children in their respective villages.

As the election code of conduct will be in force from

mid-March to the end of May, the participants decided to organize village-level consultations in the coming months to implement their decisions. They also agreed to carry out lobbying efforts with progressive and democratic political parties during the election campaign period to advocate for the demands and rights discussed during the gathering.

As a symbol of the beginning of their campaign toward a sustainable future for both people and nature in their villages, participants were given traditional tree saplings to plant in their communities.

INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT OF CATHOLIC STUDENTS (IMCS)- PAX ROMANA ASIA PACIFIC

JANUARY TO MARCH 2026

Regional Solidarity and Policy Advocacy

Within the quarter of 2026, IMCS remained firm with its regional engagement, bringing together months of preparation into meaningful dialogue with partners, member movements and policy spaces. At its heart was a conviction that advocacy must be rooted in relationships and that regional solidarity is built not only in large gatherings, but in the quiet work of listening and accompaniment between them.



Preparatory Sessions for the 13th APFSD Side Event

In preparation for the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development 2026, IMCS Asia Pacific convened two preparatory sessions with youth networks, faith-based partners, civil society actors, and Indigenous representatives to reflect on the role of interfaith and intercultural cooperation in sustainable development.

The first session highlighted national realities and community-based initiatives, emphasizing youth formation, faith-based action, and

Indigenous knowledge as key contributions to sustainable development pathways.

Participants also explored the role of ethics, religion, and multistakeholder collaboration in advancing the SDGs, emphasizing the importance of meaningful youth participation, stronger connections between grassroots actors and institutions, and responsible engagement from the private sector.



Pathways Forward: Labour Mobility and Workers' Rights

IMCS Asia Pacific participated in the dialogue "Pathways Forward: Recentring Workers' Rights in Labour Mobility Systems," convened by Migrant Forum in Asia and the Migrant Youth and Children Platform.

The discussion emphasized the need to place human dignity and migrant workers' rights at the center of labour mobility policies. Participants highlighted the importance of strengthening protection mechanisms, amplifying migrant voices, and addressing cross-border vulnerabilities, reaffirming a shared commitment to just and accountable migration governance.

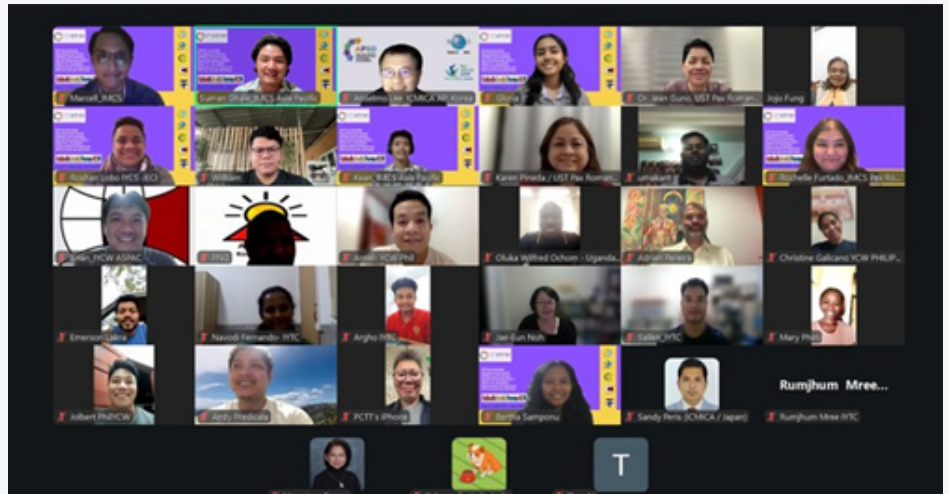
Side Event at the 13th Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

On 27 February in Bangkok, Thailand, IMCS Asia Pacific co-organized the side event “Youth, Interfaith, and Intercultural Partnerships: Weaving the Social Threads for Sustainable Communities” at the 13th Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development.

The dialogue emphasized that sustainable development is shaped not only by policy and financing, but also by relationships, shared values, and collective responsibility. Key insights highlighted intergenerational mentorship, the role of faith-based organizations in social cohesion and environmental stewardship, and the link between Indigenous identity, land, and sustainability. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific also highlighted parametric insurance and regional risk-sharing as key approaches to climate adaptation, supporting SDGs 9, 11, and 13.

Catholic Social Forum 2026

On the same day, Pax Romana IMCS together with ICMICA Pax Romana, the



International Youth Training Center, and International Young Catholic Students convened an online regional forum under the theme: “UN Sustainable Development Goals and Catholic Social Teaching: Dilexi Te, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Leo XIV on Love for the Poor.” Drawing on Pax Romana’s consultative standing with the United Nations, the forum positioned itself as a space where Catholic moral imagination meets the language of global development, asking what faithful engagement with policy spaces looks like in 2026.

Interfaith Prayer Gathering for Peace in the Middle East

IMCS Asia Pacific convened an online interfaith prayer service for peace in the Middle East, bringing together voices from Catholic, Muslim, Bahà’í, Buddhist and Indigenous

communities across Asia Pacific and beyond. The service offered prayers for those who had lost their lives, for grieving families, for communities living in fear and for leaders that might find the courage to choose dialogue, justice, and reconciliation over violence.

A moment of cultural peace greetings wove through the gathering, with participants sharing salutations from their own languages and traditions: a resonant reminder that the movement’s diversity is not incidental but part of its shared witness. The gathering affirmed what becomes possible when communities choose to stand with one another across differences holding together both the urgency of the present and the hope for lasting peace.



International Womens Day: Honoring Her Legacy

On 8 March 2026, IMCS–AP marked International Women’s Day through the intercontinental webinar “Honoring Her Legacy: Celebrating Women in the Journey of the Movement.”

The gathering honored the contributions of women across all levels of the movement, while speakers emphasized mentorship, women’s leadership in decision-making spaces, and the need to address persistent patriarchal structures.

The event also launched the campaign “My Reflection, My Commitment: Rights, Justice, Action for All Women and Girls,” inviting students worldwide to share reflections and commitments throughout March.

Movie Screening: Jhola

On 28–29 March 2026, members of the IMCS Asia Pacific Commission held a screening and reflection on Jhola, an award-winning Nepali film depicting the historical practice of sati and its impact on women.

The discussion examined the broader context of women’s rights, acknowledging the

abolition of such practices while recognizing the persistence of systemic discrimination, including violence and harmful social norms. The campaign aimed to both honor women’s contributions and critically engage with the realities that continue to affect their dignity and well-being.

The discussion served as a meaningful culmination of a month-long campaign on women’s rights, which began with a webinar titled “Celebrating Her Legacy: Celebrating the Roles and Contributions of Women in the Movement.”

Upcoming activities

In the coming months, IMCS Asia Pacific will continue strengthening regional engagement through a series of initiatives that connect faith perspectives with contemporary social, ecological, and pastoral realities across the Asia Pacific.

Core Formation Programs

- Continued Learning and Action Program (CLAP)
- National Transformative Leadership Program (NTL)

International Advocacy and Faith-Based Forums

- Side event alongside the ECOSOC Youth Forum in New York - April
- Laudato Si Week - May

Open to What Emerges

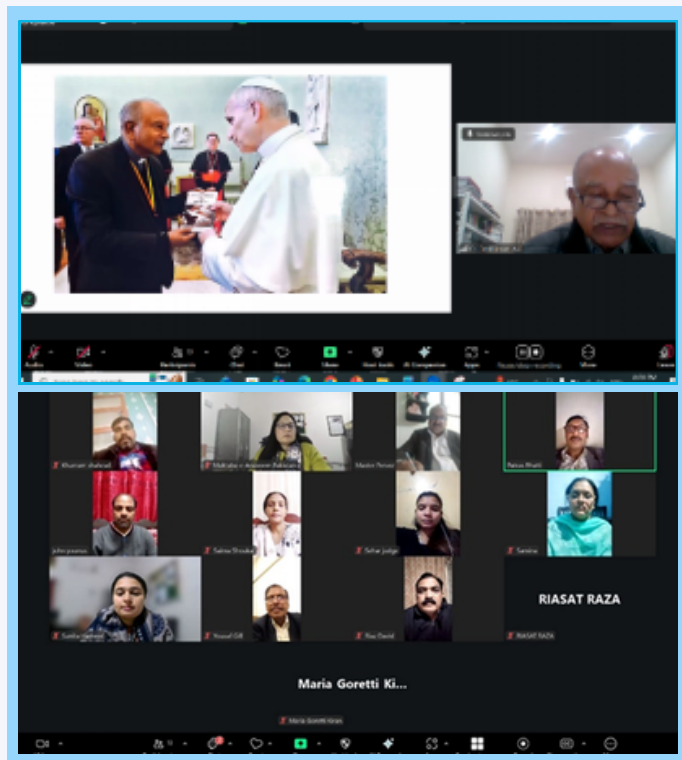
- Catholic Youth Leadership Academy (CAYLA)
- Internship Program
- Advocacy training programs;
- Other regional formation opportunities

MAKTABA-E-ANAVEEM PAKISTAN (MAP) ACTIVITIES

JANUARY TO MARCH 2026

ORIENTATION SESSION FOR SPEAKERS

On 8 January 2025, an Orientation session was conducted on Zoom for the speakers of Contextual Theology for Laity-Online Sessions. Rev. Fr. Emmanuel Asi was the resource person. A total of 17 participants attended the online training session.



The photo above shows a snapshot from the presentation of Fr. Asi. The photos below feature participants during the Coordinators' Meeting.

COORDINATORS MEETING

Maktaba-e-Anaveem Pakistan (MAP) conducted an online meeting with MAP Coordinators and Assistant Coordinators on 7 January 2026. Mrs. Alishbah Javed Akhtar welcomed the participants and expressed appreciation for their commitment and

continued support in promoting the mission and activities of MAP.

The following key points were discussed:

- Annual Membership
- Contextual Theology for Laity – Online Session Membership
- Annual Planner
- Celebration of 37 Years of MAP Services

Participants actively contributed to the discussion by sharing suggestions and ideas aimed at strengthening participation and improving future planning. A total of 16 coordinators attended the meeting.

SEMINAR: PASCHAL MYSTERY

Maktaba-e-Anaveem Pakistan (MAP), in collaboration with Our Lady of Sorrows, Kasur, organized a seminar on 12 February 2026 at Our Lady of Sorrows Church, Latif Pura, Kasur.

The theme of the seminar was “Paschal Mystery.” The Paschal Mystery refers to the suffering, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ—the central mystery of the Christian faith through which humanity receives salvation and new life.

Ms. Sunita Hameed presented an introduction to MAP. The program began with an opening prayer led by Rev. Fr. Maqsood Nazir OMI. Mrs. Alishbah Javed Akhtar served as the resource person and explained the theological and spiritual significance of the Paschal Mystery in the life of believers.

The seminar concluded with gratitude and renewed spiritual inspiration among

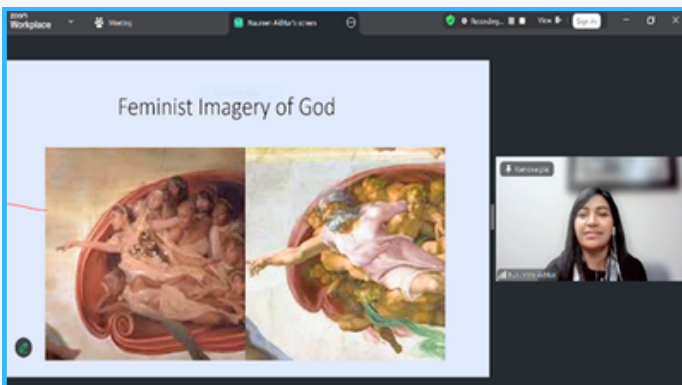
participants. A total of 70 participants from various cities and villages attended the seminar.



Participants during the seminar on the Paschal Mystery held at Our Lady of Sorrows Church.

ONLINE SESSIONS: CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY FOR LAITY- JANUARY TO MARCH 2026

Contextual Theology for Laity-Online Sessions is a three-year project (2024-2026). Two evening sessions are conducted on Saturdays twice a month. The total registered members for the Online Sessions in 2026 are 45 from different cities of Pakistan and from Overseas, Dubai, California, USA, Kuwait. A total of 5 online sessions is conducted.



This screenshot featured one of the discussion during the seminar

SEMINAR: SYNODAL CHURCH- COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION, MISSION

MAP organized a seminar from 25–27 February 2026 at the Theological Institute for Laity (TIL) under the theme “Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission.”

The seminar focused on the Final Document of the Bishops’ Synod, which MAP translated into Urdu (the national language) for the

formation of the laity. Mrs. Alishbah Javed Akhtar presented the aims and objectives of the seminar and highlighted the services and mission of MAP.

The following topics were presented:

- Introduced the XVI Bishop Synod by Ms. Anila Simon
- Accompanying note of the Holy Father, Pope Francis by Mr. Khurram Shahzad
- “The Heart of Synodality” (Called by the Holy Spirit to Conversion) by Ms. Maria Goretti Kiran
- On the Boat, together: Conversation of Relationships by Master Pervez Akbar
- Cast the Net by Sr. Rebecca James
- An Abundant Catch (The conversation of Bonds) by Fr. Faryad Ansar
- “So, I send You” (Forming a people for Missionary Discipleship) & A Feast for All Peoples by Ms. Naureen Akhtar

Participants actively engaged in group discussions, presentations, and interactive sessions, sharing insights and experiences that fostered dialogue, mutual learning, and collaboration in the spirit of a Synodal Church. A plantation activity was also organized to promote the spirit of ‘Laudato Si’ and care for our common home.

The seminar proved to be a meaningful and enriching experience, strengthening participants’ understanding of synodality and encouraging active participation in the life and mission of the Church. A total of 55 participants from different cities of Pakistan attended the seminar.



Photos of participants during group presentation



50TH CELEBRATION OF FR. EMMANUEL YOUSAF

MAP celebrated the 50th (1976-2026) Priestly Ordination of Rev. Fr. Emmanuel Yousaf on 28 February 2026 at Theological Institute for Laity (TIL). He is serving as the vice Chairperson of MAP. It was a gesture to give tribute to Fr. Emmanuel Yousaf on his unforgotten service in Pakistan. MAP honored him by presenting a shield in recognition of his lifelong service and dedication.



37 Years (1989- 2026) SERVICES OF MAP

On 28th February 2026, MAP 37 years Jubilee was celebrated (1989-2026) Services of MAP. The chief guest was Mr. Shahzad Bashir



Project Coordinator Barnabas aid Pakistan. Thanksgiving Eucharistic Mass was celebrated by Rev. Fr. Emmanuel Yousaf. Symbolically Jubilee candle was enlightened by Rev. Fr. Emmanuel Asi (Chairperson MAP) and guests.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM)

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held on 28 February 2026 at the MAP Head Office, Theological Institute for Laity (TIL), G.T. Road, Sadhoke, District Gujranwala. MAP friends, well-wishers, board members, coordinators, and members from different cities of Pakistan participated in the gathering.

During the meeting, MAP launched several important

publications and initiatives, including the MAP Annual Newsletter 2025, Annual Planner 2026, the book Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission, the Dictionary of Theology, and the MAP E-Book Store. Participation certificates were also awarded to students who completed the 2025 Contextual Theology for Laity Online Sessions.

The occasion further recognized dedicated service within MAP. Mrs. Alishbah Javed Akhtar was honored for 20 years of committed service, while Mr. Javeed Akhtar was recognized for 30 years of faithful contribution. Rev. Fr. Emmanuel Yousaf, Vice Chairperson of MAP, presented commemorative shields as tokens of appreciation for their valuable dedication.

WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION: RIGHTS, JUSTICE, AND ACTION FOR ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS

MAP in collaboration with the Women Theological Forum (WTF), celebrated International Women's Day on 17 March 2026 at the Theological Institute for Laity (TIL). The event brought together participants to reflect on women's empowerment and rights. A candle was lit to honor and celebrate the dignity, strength, and valuable contributions of women.

Mrs. Alishbah Javed Akhtar delivered a thoughtful and inspiring presentation on the theme "Rights, Justice, and Action for All Women and Girls" within the Pakistani context. She highlighted the challenges faced by women in Pakistan, including limited access to education, social inequalities, and cultural barriers that often restrict women's full participation in society.

Emphasizing the importance of justice, she called for equal opportunities and the protection of women's fundamental rights in all spheres of life. Her presentation further reflected on the role of awareness,



education, and faith-based values in promoting dignity, respect, and equality for all women and girls. It served as a powerful reminder that sustainable change becomes possible when society stands united in supporting women's rights and encouraging their active participation in national development.

The program concluded with a renewed commitment to uphold the rights, dignity, and equality of all women and girls. A total of 30 participants attended the program.



UPCOMING PROGRAM APRIL TO MAY 2026

1. Contextual Theology for Laity online Sessions Twice a month
2. Seminar: Participation in the Resurrection at Karachi 9 April 2026
3. Catholic Writers in Pakistan 23 -24 April 2026
4. Mother 's day celebration 10 May 2026
5. Seminar: Participation in the Resurrection at Karachi 1 May 2026
6. Seminar: Women Leaders in the Bible 2 May 2026

WOORI THEOLOGY INSTITUTE (WTI) ACTIVITIES

JANUARY TO MARCH 2026

2026년
우리가 함께
준비
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나

제3천년기 교회의 비전

프란치스코 교황의 유산을 중심으로

기간: 2026년 3월~11월 마지막주 월요일 19:30~21:00

- 기간: 2026년 3월~6월, 9월~11월
- 시간: 매달 마지막 주 월요일 저녁 7시 30분 ~ 9시
- 방법: 온라인 줌(Zoom), 참가비 무료 (QR신청)
- 문의: 02-2672-8342, 010-3361-8342

회차	일시	주제	발표자
1	3/30	3차 세계대전의 길목에서 외치는 '형제애'	박문수
2	4/27	프란치스코 교황과 교회 개혁	황경훈
3	5/25	프란치스코 교황과 여성	이미영
4	6/29	프란치스코 교황과 해방신학	김항섭
5	8/31	프란치스코 교황과 '시노드 정신'(Synodality)	경동현
6	9/28	프란치스코 교황과 청년	류상현
7	10/26	프란치스코 교황과 이주민 난민	조민아
8	11/30	프란치스코 교황과 평신도 교육	정준교

Webinar Commemorating the 1st Anniversary of the Passing of Pope Francis

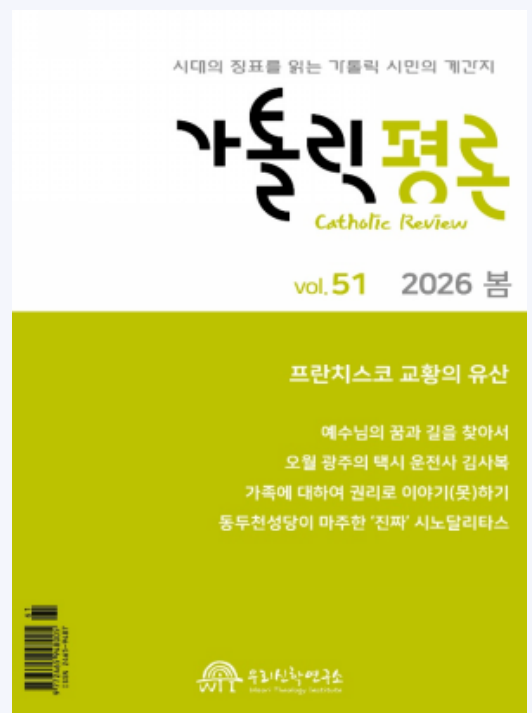
- *Schedule: March–June & August–November 2026*
- *Time: Last Monday of the month at 7:30 PM (8 sessions in total)*
- *Themes: The series begins with a lament at the threshold of World War III, followed by in-depth discussions on Church reform, women, and liberation theology during the first half of the year. In the second half, the dialogue continues by focusing on Synodality, youth, migrants and refugees, and concludes with the vital topic of lay education.*

Publication of Catholic Review No. 51 (Spring 2026)

- *Pages: 200 pages*
- *Price: 13,000 KRW*

The quarterly journal **Catholic Review** aims to shape Korean Catholic discourse through the profound reflections of Catholic intellectuals, fostered by open dialogue and solidarity. Our mission is to provide a platform for deep communication and rigorous self-reflection within the Korean Catholic Church.

In an internet age where brief fragments of writing are the norm, we continue to introduce works that pursue the **"ever-ancient, ever-new"**—the practice of deep reading, long-form thinking, and communal discussion. We invite you to join us as a companion on this journey of shared insight.



ENDING WARS AND BUILDING PEACE IN ASIA

Dr. Paul Hwang

Blood in Gaza and the Suffering of Asia

Today, we live in a time of such horrific violence that the word "peace" feels almost heavy to utter. The slaughter in the Gaza Strip leaves a deep scar on the conscience of humanity. Beyond the loss of innocent lives to bombings, the current situation in Gaza—where trucks carrying essential food and medicine are blocked, leaving people to starve and die without surgery—goes beyond "extinction" or "genocide" of the Palestinian people. It is an act that eradicates the last shred of "humanity" in the people of Gaza fought for them to preserve even in death, which is an unpardonable war crime. Despite the so-called ceasefire, the reality is a continuous tragedy where innocent lives are swept away daily under this systematic oppression.

This tragedy strikes directly at the lives of people in Asia. As tensions between Israel/USA and Iran escalate, the security crisis in the Middle East is shaking the global economy. Gasoline and commodity prices have skyrocketed, devastating the livelihoods of common people across Asia. In particular, as import/export routes for fertilizer and grain are cut off, poor Asian nations with low food self-sufficiency face the existential threat of famine. This structural vicious cycle, where the greed and hatred of one region snatch the food away from the poor worldwide, is ongoing at this very moment.

The Courage of Leaders and the Limits of Greed

Even in this pitch-black darkness, prophetic voices are sparking a flame of hope. First, in the religious sphere, Pope Leo XIV is strongly calling for peace over war. Particularly on March 15, 2026, the Pope stood in firm opposition to the logic of power advocated by President Donald Trump. The curses poured out by the Trump camp in response paradoxically demonstrate the immense power of the truth contained in the Pope's message of peace.

This courageous and prophetic action is mirrored in the political arena. On April 10, 2026, President Lee Jae-myung of South Korea demonstrated the courage to explicitly point out Israel's responsibility for the Gaza massacre and the Iran-related conflicts from the perspective of "universal human rights." Despite fierce backlash from Israel, his firm counter-rebuttal—that universal human rights and the right to life are non-negotiable—has resonated deeply with the international community.

We believe that such prophetic actions by these leaders will serve as a model for others and act as a crucial lever in easing tensions and eventually ending the wars. Ultimately, we are witnessing how the greed of one individual can drive all of humanity into suffering. It is a painful lesson that human beings must struggle at every moment to strip away the greed within themselves and constantly seek strength through prayer and supplication.

Blood in Gaza and the Suffering of Asia

This year, we experienced a rare and symbolic intersection of religious practices: the Islamic month of Ramadan and the Christian season of Lent began at the same time. The common thread between these two traditions is "fasting." Fasting is not merely the act of abstaining from food. Anyone who has fasted for more than three days knows it is a struggle to thoroughly empty oneself beyond physical hunger.

This process of "self-emptying" is an act of pouring out the "false self" and "greed," and a practical gesture of filling that empty space with the Merciful Allah and the God of Love. If we adopt the meaning of fasting as our identity and practice continuous self-emptying, the greed that fuels the fires of war will lose its place. When Asian Christians, especially the youth who carry the future, continue these small practices of emptying in their daily lives, peace will find its way to us in the near future. We are not mere spectators waiting for wars to stop. We must be "Peace-builders" who cultivate peace where we stand.

We invite you to submit your writings/articles to be published on the website www.asianlayleaders.com and our E-newsletter.

Writings can be in the form of articles, opinions, poetry, or activities that you have done. Feel free to send it through our contacts below:

Email: info@asianlayleaders.com

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