



Global news bulletin

31st January

WCC celebrates Pete Seeger

Pete Seeger, celebrated folk singer and political activist from the United States is remembered by the WCC especially for his numerous



performances at the WCC 4th Assembly in Uppsala, Sweden in 1968.

Seeger passed away on 27 January at the age of 94 in New York.

The WCC Uppsala assembly was held at a particularly eventful moment, within months of intensified conflict marked by the Tet offensive in Vietnam, the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert F. Kennedy, the Soviet incursion in Czechoslovakia and the fall of the Dubcek government, the "events of May 1968" in Paris and the announced retirement under pressure of US president Lyndon Johnson.

Pete Seeger, long active in labour struggles, the US civil rights movement and anti-war demonstrations, addressed these circumstances at the WCC Uppsala assembly - as did such noted assembly speakers as anthropologist Margaret Mead, Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda, British economist Barbara Ward, novelist James Baldwin and Sri Lankan theologian D.T. Niles.

Malawi Anglicans address rapid population growth

The Anglican Church in Malawi has joined other faith groups in the country to educate people on the importance of family planning considering Malawi's rapid population growth rate.

By Bellah Zulu, ACNS - Malawi's current population of 15 million is expected to grow to about 40 million in the next 20 years "if strong measures for controlling the birth rate per year are not put in place."

In an interview with ACNS, Bishop of Upper Shire, the Rt Revd Brighton Malasa said that his Diocese would participate in addressing the effects of rapid population growth through "preaching in their churches as well as ensuring that the two hospitals and many other health centres owned by the church teach people the importance of family planning.

"Last year, we marked August 25 as a special day for teaching people on the effects of overpopulation," he said. "One of the sermons emphasised that overpopulation would lead to the shortage of learning materials in schools and would put more stress on parents. Health facilities would also be under a lot of pressure."

Many church organisations including the Malawi Council of Churches (MCC) –of which the Anglican Church is a part— and the Quadria Muslim Association of Malawi (QMAM), partnered with the government of Malawi through the sanctioned Health Population Project (HPP) to tackle population growth in the country.

The government there considers the inclusion of faith-based organisations an important step in purveying development and population related information to the masses since about 97 percent of the population are religious followers.

"The Anglican Diocese of Upper Shire believes that overpopulation can lead to unhappy families, miserable villages, gloomy districts and a lifeless country," said the Bishop. "All the people of God in Malawi are called to fight against overpopulation which might lead to too much pressure on the available resources."

The USAID-funded HPP in collaboration with the University of North Carolina supports the initiative through the support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Bishop Malasa concluded: “All Malawians should remember that the square kilometres of the earth shall remain the same though the population is growing. Strong measures should be followed in order to curb the negative effects of overpopulation.”



Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference speaks during the annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. holiday commemorative service at the Ebenezer Baptist Church, Monday, Jan. 21, 2013, in Atlanta. The speech marks the first time a Latino leader has served as the keynote speaker for the commemorative service on the King holiday.

Imago Dei: Evangelical Campaign Says Everyone - Including Gays -- Reflect God's Image

A group of Christian leaders has set up a new campaign to emphasize that all people — gay, liberal, undocumented or otherwise — reflect the image of God.

Six Christian leaders, including Focus on the Family President Jim Daly, “Touched by an Angel” star Roma Downey and her producer husband Mark Burnett, have created a coalition called “Imago Dei,” Latin for “image of God,” to encourage people to treat each other with respect.

“If we had the image of God in mind for every human being, we could change the world,” said the Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, who is leading the cause. “I want Christians to not be known for what we oppose but for what we propose.”

The campaign, also joined by Liberty Law School Dean Mat Staver and Life Today’s James Robison, is intended to include all human beings, but it offers specific examples.

“For the image of God exists in all human beings: black and white; rich and poor; straight and gay; conservative and liberal; victim and perpetrator; citizen and undocumented; believer and unbeliever,” the campaign states.

Rodriguez said it’s not intended to target a specific group or issue, even as the campaign has raised eyebrows for attracting the support of conservative leaders who have vocally opposed gay rights in recent years.

“We intentionally listed groups to capture the idea that there’s no exception to the rule. Our emphasis is not LGBT or political ideology or color of skin,” he said. “It’s not germane as to whether or not people can change sexuality or not. It’s not about condoning a lifestyle, political ideology, worldview.”

Rodriguez said he got the idea for the campaign when he was at a restaurant with his family in Sacramento, Calif., and saw girls as young as 12 and 13 who he believed were involved in sex trafficking.

“I looked at my wife and said, ‘That girl has the image of God,’” he said, before launching a sex trafficking ministry in his church and eventually in NHCLC.

The biblical emphasis of Imago Dei stems from Genesis, where God said he would make mankind in his own image. Evangelicals have signed similar kinds of statements in the past, but this campaign is more focused and simple, said Glenn Stanton of Focus on the Family.

“If someone says something out of line, someone else can say, ‘Hey remember this, how you signed it?’” Stanton said. “Each one of us are image bearers in the sense that each one of us bear the image of God that others don’t.”

Rodriguez and Daly were included in a movement of religious leaders that created the Manhattan Declaration, a 2009 manifesto that emphasized protecting religious liberty and resisting abortion and gay marriage. The document included a section on the idea that humans bear the image of God.

“We shouldn’t forget that the doctrine of Imago Dei necessarily leads to other commitments, especially as it relates to life, marriage and religious freedom,” said Eric Teetsel, director of the Manhattan Declaration. “Christians have been emphasizing the Imago Dei for a long time. It’s often fallen on deaf ears. If this movement causes people to hear it for the first time, that’s a wonderful thing.”

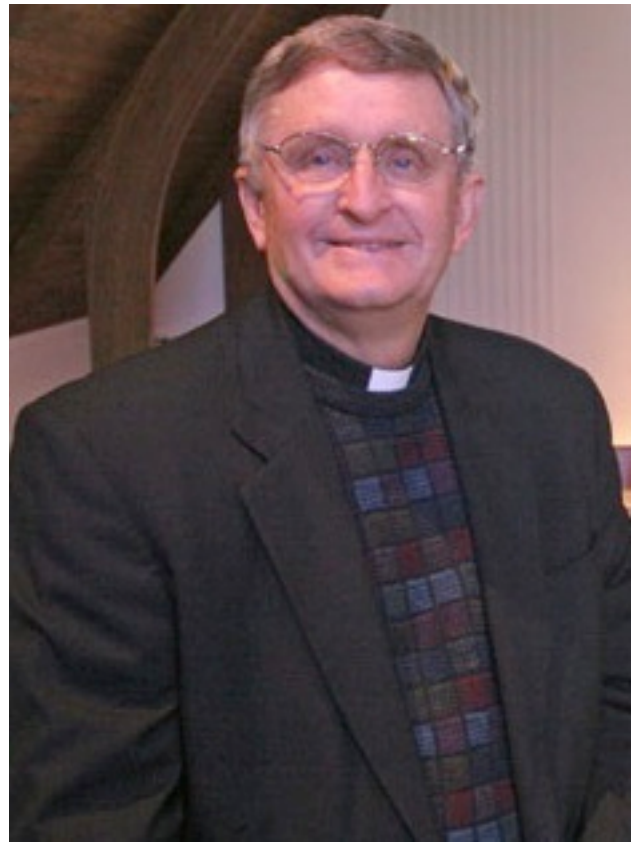
Rodriguez declined to disclose how much money is involved in the campaign, saying they are creating financial support, eventually aiming to hire Danielle

Jones, who currently leads NHCLC's initiative on sex trafficking. He said Imago Dei plans to create wristbands and launch public service announcements next fall.

St George's College Jerusalem - new course chaplain

The Very Dr. Rev. Graham M. Smith, dean of [St. George's College in Jerusalem](#) has announced the appointment of the Rev. Mike Billingsley as College Chaplain for 2014.

"It is a joy to welcome Mike and Judy Billingsley to the Cathedral Close," said Smith. "Mike will be a caring pastor as pilgrims find their way to St. George with its first-rate courses, beautiful accommodations and gourmet food!"



The Rev. Billingsley recently retired from Christ Episcopal Church in Medway, Mass. A graduate of Virginia Theological Seminary, Mr. Billingsley was ordained a priest in the Diocese of Atlanta in 1992, following a 20 year career in the United States Coast Guard. His wife, Judy, is an oncology nurse, and they both "fell in love" with the College and the City of Jerusalem when they attended a course April 2013.

Boko Haram behind church attacks in Nigeria

Churches, police stations and government buildings are being targeted by Islamist terror group Boko Haram

An attack on a Catholic church in north-eastern Nigeria on Sunday has left at least 22 Christians dead and many more wounded, though local reports suggest the fatalities may be much higher.

Bishop Stephen Dami Mamza told the BBC that a group of men arrived in trucks towards the end of the usual Sunday Mass service in Waga Chakawa village in Adamawa state.

The attackers locked the doors of the church and fired into the congregation, cutting the throats of those who tried to escape. They detonated bombs and then went on a four hour rampage, burning houses and taking hostages from the village between 10am and 2pm.



Reverend Raymond Danbouye has confirmed that at least 22 people were killed in the attack and were buried in a service on Monday. "There is no protection. We cannot predict where and when they are going to attack. People can't sleep with their eyes closed," Mamza laments.

It is suspected that Boko Haram is behind the attack - a group that was officially labelled a 'Foreign Terrorist Organisation' by the US government in November last year.

The organisation, which has ties to Al-Qaeda and whose name translates as "Western education is sacrilege", is responsible for over two thousand deaths in Nigeria. Its leadership has declared intent to cleanse the country of Christians, eradicate Nigerian democracy and replace it with an Islamic state guided by Sharia law.

Boko Haram is also believed to have carried out a second attack on Sunday in Kawuri village in the neighbouring state of Borno.

At least 52 people were killed in the violence, which also involved gunfire and the detonation of bombs as a busy weekend market was packing up. Three hundred homes were subjected to arson attacks and many civilians who survived are suffering with terrible burns as a result.

President Goodluck Jonathon, who declared a state of emergency in three Muslim-majority north-eastern states in May last year and authorised increased military powers to tackle the ongoing violence from Boko Haram, has spoken out following the recent attacks, saying: "Nigeria is getting its share of the terror.

"God willing, Nigeria will overcome these challenges," he assured.

"It's quite a challenging period for our traditional rulers, religious leaders and opinion leaders because of the security challenges we've [faced], especially in the north-eastern part of this country.

"Let me on behalf of the government express our condolences over the people that have died in this unnecessary Boko Haram insurgency over this period," he concluded.

International Christian Concern, which advocates on behalf of persecuted Christians around the world, has called for increased awareness of and prayer for those suffering in Nigeria.

Regional manager William Stark has stressed the importance of an urgent response to these new attacks, saying the Nigerian government "must take decisive action" to ensure the safety of Christians living in Nigeria. "If decisive action is not taken, the unbelievable violence being perpetrated against Christians in Nigeria will only continue to accelerate and will likely reach genocidal levels in the near future," he warned.

Sniffer dogs and 50 officers hunt stolen vial of Pope's blood

A vial containing the blood of Pope John Paul the Second has been stolen from a Church in Italy.

The theft has sparked a



nationwide search involving sniffer dogs and 50 police officers.

The blood was stolen from a church in the Abruzzo region, where the late pontiff liked to go on skiing holidays.

In our way we are all keepers of the pope's blood

Our reverence for relics, going back to our earliest consciousness, helps us fit grief into a comprehensible narrative - Andrew Brown writes in The Guardian

John Paul II was at pains to present his own lingering and ghastly decline as a religious act, an offering to God.' Photograph: Plinio Lepri/AP

The [theft of a vial of the blood of the late pope John Paul II](#) from a church in the mountains outside Rome is odd at first sight because it looks so strange to keep such a thing. On second thoughts, nothing could be more natural than keeping relics of the dead. We keep all kinds of family treasures, handwritten letters and other tokens of an absent presence. What's strange is keeping relics of dead people we never knew.



'John Paul II was at pains to present his own lingering and ghastly decline as a religious act, an offering to God.'

Protestants tend not to do this in the same way as Catholics. Parts of our cities are crowded with statues, but these are relics at one remove, so to say: they are symbolic recreations with no physical link

to the original. If the [statue of Winston Churchill in Parliament Square](#), in Westminster, were also his sepulchre it would be closer to a relic. If it were also thought to work miracles, that would be better still. But I don't think that even Ukip members come to pray at statues of Churchill.

A statue stands to a relic in the same relation as an alphabet stands to a set of pictographs. The meaning has been transferred from a physical connection to an arbitrary symbol. This is less true in an age of photography, when there are numerous representations of a face and body against which statues can be matched, but even then they are a re-creation, not a copy. Whenever I meet someone famous, or anyone whom I have only ever known from pictures, they always look quite different: not just smaller, but more normal.

And this brings up one of the oddest features of a relic. It is always possible not to believe, and to scoff. For anything considered holy and miracle-working, there will be outsiders who deny its power. One of the really memorable passages of [Rowan Williams's book on Dostoevsky](#) is his discussion of an icon painting spilled from its case in an attempt to show it's nothing but paint and wood. Williams claims that icons are invulnerable to sacrilege of this sort, but this is an understanding so sophisticated that it's unlikely to be widely shared. Try burning a flag, or even a book, and the counterarguments to Williams's blithe optimism will be forcefully presented.

In the case of saints' blood, there is a particularly creepy connection. There are many examples of blood being collected from the sites of martyrdom, religious or otherwise. It seems a natural and profoundly primitive gesture to collect or use the blood of a fallen comrade as a way of binding the living to them. It works the other way round, too: in the [Aeneid](#), blood is what the ghosts crave and what they demand before they will speak when the hero visits the underworld. What matters here is the connection of blood with personality and with a particular individuality. This is of course almost impossible to prove, and means that blood can also be associated with one of the most notorious fraudulent miracles, the annual [liquefaction of the blood of St Gennaro in Naples](#).

All this is primitive, but we never outgrow it. I'm not sure we should. The roots of our reverence for relics go back to our earliest consciousness and are nourished there.

In fact some of the best and most thoughtful discussions of relics, and of things as quasi-animate symbols, comes in children's literature, where the boundaries between living and non-living are permeable – in particular two stories about how love brings things to life: [The Velveteen Rabbit](#), and Russell Hoban's [The Mouse and His Child](#).

The Mouse and His Child is a spectacularly dark and unhappy book. The more the toys who are its protagonists become alive, the more they suffer. That, though, is also a part of the function of relics. They are ways of making suffering comprehensible, if only by fitting it into part of a narrative. John Paul II was at pains to present his own lingering and ghastly decline as a religious act, an offering to God. Believers will gain as much from the memory of his weakness as from that of his strength.

And I don't think that we could ever attain a stage of disembodied rationality where the remains of the dead had no call on us. Some of the dead at least, for it is part of the experience of grief that there are always other people to whom our grief means nothing. There is a [Welsh epigram](#) that goes: "I walked in the churchyard where a hundred bodies lie, I set foot upon my sweetheart's grave, I felt my poor heart leap." And so long as we walk this earth there will be places and things that make our heart leap, and I suppose there will always be people like the thieves in the Abruzzo mountains, who will try to steal them and sell them back to us.

Phillipines Typhoon update

Christian Aid reports - In the wake of Typhoon Haiyan our partners are there, delivering vital relief to families who were caught in the path of the storm. 14 million people were affected by the typhoon, and more than 4 million have been left homeless.

Our local partners have been working tirelessly since Haiyan hit, reaching more than 150,000 people with items such as food, emergency shelter and other life-saving essentials.

The coming year will see a focus on the longer term challenges of rebuilding people's lives and livelihoods.

Christian Aid are supporting the poor and marginalised who have seen their sources of income devastated – crops washed away, fishing boats wrecked, and the coconut trees they so greatly rely on destroyed.

Christian Aid partners including CODE, Coastal Core, PhilNet/RDI–Leyte and PRDCI have reached people in some of the worst affected and most isolated areas of the provinces of Iloilo, Leyte, Samar, Eastern Samar and Palawan.

People affected have received vital emergency relief items such as food, water, sleeping mats, blankets and shelter kits.

Items distributed include:

- Water and food, including rice, cooking oil, tinned sardines, corned beef, biscuits
- Sleeping mats, blankets and soap and toothpaste
- Tarpaulin and ropes (shelter kits)

As the new year begins, our focus will soon turn towards supporting communities to build back stronger. We will look at restoring shelter alongside livelihoods, particularly agriculture and fishing. In doing so, supporting some of the 5.9 million workers who've lost livelihoods or whose sources of income have been severely affected by the typhoon.

Lourdes Abude (57) and her family lost their fishing boats in the Typhoon.

“We've planted sweet potatoes and other root crops, which we aim to sell to make a living once they've grown. We grew them before, but they were washed away by the storm, but we're replanting. Right now, our priority is our livelihood. We need to restart and earn an income. Growing root vegetables won't make as much money as fishing, but it's our only option right now. We're relying on relief for food now, and last week received a food distribution from Christian Aid, which included items including rice, sugar, cooking oil and canned goods. It really helped us. I'm very thankful to God, because we were saved. I felt we were being watched over, because our house wasn't totally destroyed.”

Of the four million people displaced, more than 100,000 are still living across 381 evacuation centers. “You have a lot of people in a crowded place, without much to do. There is no electricity, so a lot of [common] places are not well-lit. These are all factors that put women and girls at increased risk for violence,” said Nolibelyn Macabagdal, a DSWD social worker.

Based on the prevalence of gender-based violence in the affected provinces, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates that 375,000 women and girls had experienced sexual violence before Haiyan and warns that without concrete efforts to improve security, and interventions focused on gender-based violence and trafficking, this number could increase by 75,000.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM), which is overseeing evacuation camps for the municipality of Guiuan in Eastern Samar Province, has built separate bathing and toilet facilities for men, women and children. “These facilities are located on either side of the camp to make sure that

people don't have to walk very far to get to them," Andrew Lind, the IOM focal point for shelter and camp coordination management (CCM), told IRIN.

The Christian Aid country team, together with partners and communities, are now planning the next phase of the response, which will include supporting people to build back their homes and livelihoods.

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