

Interreligious Thai leaders pray for peace during crisis

Antonio Anup Gonsalves, Catholic News Agency, 30 April 2014



Catholics gathered at Bangkok's Assumption Cathedral for the Good Friday liturgy to pray for peace, April 18, 2014. Credit: Antonio Anup Gonsalves/CNA.

Catholics and representatives of four other religious traditions in Thailand have prayed in union with another for peace, in light of tensions and political unrest that have threatened the nation's progress.

“Prayer has power and plays an important role in the life of the person; every religion acknowledges this fact and believes it with deep conviction in their hearts,” Archbishop Francis Xavier Kriengsak Kovithavanij of Bangkok told CNA April 18.

The Thai bishops' conference met with leaders from the nation's Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh communities, unanimously urging dialogue and prayer for a sustainable peace.

Archbishop Kriengsak said the religious leaders had heard “the silent voice of the voiceless,” and that all believe that “prayer can work miracles.”

Fr. Anucha Chaiyadej, secretary of social communications for the Thai bishops, told CNA that “five religions have joined their hands together ... to find a solution of peace through prayer, because deep in the roots of their heart they believe the existence of God.”

“The Church clearly stands with prayer, penitence, and almsgiving; and only in prayer can

we achieve that which is impossible in terms of human capacity,” he added.

Archbishop Kriengsak said the religious leaders, “worried by the present turmoil,” have converged in “seeking divine help, urging every believer to offer special prayers in their house of worship according to their belief.”

Catholics in Thailand devoted the prayer and penance of Good Friday for the nation's intentions, with Archbishop Kriengsak leading more than 1,000 in the solemn liturgy at Assumption Cathedral in Bangkok, teaching that “Christ died on the cross for the salvation of mankind and to give eternal bliss of life to mankind.”

“Christ gave his life, he redeemed mankind, and he gave us an exemplary model by which to love and serve one another.”

Archbishop Kriengsak exhorted the country’s leaders to “resolve paths of dialogue” and to lead Thailand's developmental projects with “equitable justice, free of corruption, and with non-violence for the common good.”

The southeast Asian nation has been crippled under a political crisis paralyzing economic growth since November.

Since then, more than 24 have been reported dead, and hundreds injured in clashes between "yellow shirt" opposition forces, led by Suthep Thaugsuban, a deputy prime minister in Abhisit Vejjajiva's Democrat Party administration, and "red shirts" who support Thailand's current prime minister, Yingluck Shinawatra, of the Pheu Thai Party, and her brother, Thaksin.

An election was called by Yingluck in February, but it was obstructed by protestors. The election was declared null by the Thai Constitutional Court as a result of disruptions by protestors.

Archbishop Kriengsak has appealed to Thai political leaders, urging them that the only way through the turmoil is by communication and dialogue.