News
Social Justice



St. Francis Xavier Sr. Ann Nu Thawng kneels in front of police and soldiers during an anti-coup protest in Myitkyina, Myanmar, Feb. 28, 2021. (CNS/Courtesy of Myitkyina News Journal)

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As the Myanmar military rule with an iron fist, Catholic religious sisters have come out in the open with their charity works among the vulnerable and most in need.

The Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition joined hands with Buddhist women to help victims of a major fire on April 13 in Mandalay, the second-largest city in the East Asian country.

The sisters are distributing food and other essential commodities among the victims after more than 30 houses were reduced to ashes in a predominantly Muslim neighborhood.

Major fires have broken out in recent days in several cities, including Yangon and Mandalay.

The blazes occur at night and dawn. But in most cases, their cause is still unknown.

A nighttime curfew is in place in the military-ruled country.

Since the February 1st takeover, Myanmar's military has increased its crackdown on people who are protesting against the coup, which ousted a democratically elected government headed by Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

The Catholic sisters have also comforted two families in Mandalay who lost two young Buddhist youths aged 18 and 19 after they were killed by security forces.

The country is now in political turmoil and poverty is widespread, which means the religious sisters have had to step up their charitable and humanitarian services.

The sisters have also been in the forefront of the protests against the military coup. They have been seen marching in the streets, praying at convents and lining up before churches to express their solidarity with the people.

Sister Ann Rosa Nu Tawng became an icon of peace when she knelt on the road while pleading with the military not to shoot unarmed civilians in Myitkyina, Kachin state in February and March.

Her courageous act even caught the attention of Pope Francis.

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"I, too, kneel on the streets of Myanmar and say, 'Stop the violence'," the pope exclaimed on March 17 during his Wednesday general audience.

Catholics have conducted prayer meetings and fasting to find a peaceful solution to the crisis since the military takeover of the Buddhist-majority country.

Priests, religious sisters and laypeople were part of the prayer session for the fallen heroes in St. Peter's Cathedral compound in Pathein diocese on April 12.

A day earlier Cardinal Charles Bo of Yangon highlighted the acts of mercy which come with good deeds.

"Hunger is not only the problem our people face: they are afraid, they are traumatized, their spirit is broken by street violence," he said in a homily for Divine Mercy Sunday.

"There are hundreds of people who live in fear, anxiety and dread. Thousands are in prisons. They all need the soothing words, like Jesus soothed his disciples: Do not be afraid, I am with you always," the cardinal added.

Myanmar has witnessed massive killings, arrests and shooting against pro-democracy protesters and unarmed civilians by the military junta who have initiated a deadly crackdown to force people to fall in line.

During the Buddhist New Year water festival from April 13-17, protesters marched in cities and towns which showed their defiance to military rule.

According to human rights groups, more than 715 people have been killed and 3,070 detained since the coup.

The military violence and authoritarian rule have overshadowed the November 2017 papal visit Myanmar where Catholics make up a very small minority.

Editor's note: *This article originally appeared on La Croix International.*

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