News Briefs

Mother Seton shrine launches initiatives to expand awareness

EMMITSBURG, Md. (CNS) — The National Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Emmitsburg is launching a series of initiatives to expand awareness of first U.S.-born saint, it announced Jan. 4, on the saint’s feast day.

The initiatives build on the momentum of a yearlong commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the saint’s death. “Underlying all that we do at the shrine is the strong belief that Mother Seton does not belong to the past. She belongs to all of us today and all those in the future who seek greater meaning in their lives and a friend in heaven,” said Rob Judge, executive director of the shrine.

The initiatives for 2022 include a series of essays, continued retreats and an added at-home retreat, an emailed prayer program and the renovation of the shrine’s museum and visitors center.

Mary statue untouched by wildfire

A statue of Mary is seen standing amid the rubble of a Louisville, Colorado, home Dec. 31, 2021. (CNS photo/courtesy Leslie Rowe)

LOUISVILLE, Colo. (CNS) — Amid the smoldering ashes of his family’s recently remodeled Louisville, Colorado, home that was destroyed by a Dec. 30 wildfire, Tom Greany found hope in a symbol of his deep Catholic faith. A statue of Mary that he and his wife Kat had placed outside their home was left unscathed except for the soot that covered its right side.

“Bricks appeared to have fallen all around her – some probably even hit her. But she didn’t even fall over,” Greany wrote in a reflection shared with Catholic News Service. He wrote about what happened just hours after the blaze raced through the suburban communities of Louisville and Superior, about 20 miles northwest of Denver. Greany wrote that the discovery of the statue is a reminder of how their faith provides protection and can “sustain us through everything.” The Greanys were among hundreds of families who lost their homes in the wildfire driven by winds estimated to top 100 mph.

Bishop: ‘God had a saving plan for all humanity’

Steuenville Bishop Jeffrey M. Monforton delivers his homily during the celebration of Christmas Eve Mass at Holy Rosary Church, Steubenville. (Screenshot/Triumph of the Cross Parish Facebook page)

By Matthew A. DiCenzo

STEUBENVILLE — Steubenville Bishop Jeffrey M. Monforton celebrated Christmas Eve Mass at Holy Rosary Church, Steubenville.

The bishop began his homily by singing the first verse of “O Come, All Ye Faithful.” The people in attendance joined the bishop in singing the hymn.

Bishop Monforton said many people have Christmas memories with family. He recalled decorating the tree with his father and making cookies with his mother.

He explained how he chose the longer form of the Gospel (see, Matthew, Chapter 1, Verses 1-25) because, as he said: “We have a record of Jesus’ genealogy, a family record, just like we all have. All of us have a family record and the Son of God, who is also the son of Mary and the adopted son of Joseph, is no different.”

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Mount Calvary Cemetery adds space for cremains

Space for 72 cremains in a columbarium were added in the St. Elizabeth section of Mount Calvary Cemetery, Steubenville, Jan. 4. Scott Yarman, director, Diocese of Steubenville Office of Facilities and Property, said memorial benches will be placed around the columbarium in the spring. For additional information, contact the cemetery office at (740) 264-1331. (Photos by Lou DiGregory)
Bishop

From Page 1

Bishop Monfor ton said, “Three groups of 14 generations demonstrate to us from the beginning God had a saving plan for all humanity, and yes, he would utilize the checkered past of humanity for our redemption.”

He continued: “This evening, my brothers and sisters, we hear that the family is the basic unit of society. It takes more than a village to raise a child, it takes a family, and the Holy Family is no different. Our Gospel today reminds us the intention of the family is to be a communion of love, even in the midst of all the messiness and challenges that can occur, the communion of love must endure.”

He said in the Second Reading (see, Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 13, Verses 16-17 and 22-25), St. Paul reminds us “Jesus did not appear, he did not drop from the sky or come out of thin air; Jesus is the son of Mary, the glory of which Isaiah in our First Reading (see, Isaiah, Chapter 62, Verses 1-5) prophesied has happened, two thousand years ago, but we celebrate it every year since.”

Bishop Monforton said, “Two thousand years ago, a baby boy was born to a carpenter and his young, virgin wife. From that point forward, all would change. The ultimate destiny of humanity would never be the same. It would be full of eternal promise. We are truly, truly blessed.”

The bishop concluded by singing the second verse of the hymn which began his homily.

Following the intercessions, Bishop Monforton blessed the Nativity scene in Holy Rosary Church.

Bishop Monforton said at the end of Mass: “Dear friends, this Christmas season, be holy; be healthy; be safe.”

On New Year’s Day, Pope Francis says a mature faith is hope-filled

By Cindy Wooden

Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — As Catholics begin a new year contemplating the motherhood of Mary, they should be inspired not to let problems weaken their faith or prevent them from helping others grow, Pope Francis said.

“In her heart, in her prayer,” he said, Mary “binds together the beautiful things and the unpleasant things,” and learns to discern God’s plan in them.

Pope Francis celebrated Mass Jan. 1, the Feast of Mary, Mother of God, and World Peace Day, in St. Peter’s Basilica and then led the recitation of the Angelus prayer in St. Peter’s Square with thousands of people, including dozens who held signs with the names of countries at war.

In his homily at the Mass, Pope Francis pleaded for an end to violence against women.

“Enough,” he said, “To hurt a woman is to insult God, who from a woman took on our humanity.”

And, in his Angelus address, Pope Francis insisted peace is a gift from God that requires human action.

“We cannot wish peace only if we have peace in our hearts, only if we receive it from the prince of peace,” he said. “But, peace is also our commitment: it asks us to take the first step, it demands concrete actions. It is built by being attentive to the least, by promoting justice, with the courage to forgive, thus extinguishing the fire of hatred.”

Peace also requires “a positive outlook as well, one that always sees, in the church as well as in society, not the evil that divides us, but the good that unites us,” the pope said. “Getting depressed or complaining is useless. We need to roll up our sleeves to build peace.”

Pope Francis said he could not look at Mary holding the baby Jesus in her arms without thinking of “young mothers and their children fleeing wars and famine or waiting in refugee camps. And there are many of them.”

“Contemplating Mary who lays Jesus in the manger, making him available to everyone, let’s remember that the world can change, and everyone’s life can improve only if we make ourselves available to others, without expecting them to begin,” he said. “If we become artisans of fraternity, we will be able to mend the threads of a world torn apart by war and violence.”

In his homily earlier at the Mass, Pope Francis asked people to consider what it must have been like for Mary, who had been told by the angel that her son would be great, to give birth in an animals’ stall and to lay her baby in a manger instead of a cradle.

“One of God’s good news is for everyone, especially the marginalized, the rejected and those who do not count in the eyes of the world,” the pope said. “For that is how God comes: not on a fast track and lacking even a cradle! That is what is beautiful about seeing him there, laid in a manger.

But for Mary, a mother, it must have been painful to see her son in such poverty, the pope said.

Pope Francis contrasted the amazement and enthusiasm of the shepherds with the quiet, pensive reaction of Mary.

“The shepherds tell everyone about what they had seen,” he said. “The story told by the shepherds, and their own amazement, remind us of the beginnings of faith, when everything seems easy and straightforward.”

“Mary’s pensiveness, on the other hand, is the expression of a mature, adult faith,” he said. “Mary is not a newborn faith, but a faith that now gives birth. For spiritual fruitfulness is born of trials and testing.”

Mary “gives God to the world” in a dark stable in Bethlehem, he said. “Others, before the scandal of the manger, might feel deeply troubled. She does not: she keeps those things, pondering them in her heart.”

And through faith, he said, “in her mother’s heart, Mary comes to realize that the glory of the Most High appears in humility; she welcomes the plan of salvation whereby God must lie in a manger. She sees the divine child frail and shivering, and she accepts the wondrous divine interplay between grandeur and littleness.”

Mary, like most mothers, knew how “to hold together the various threads of life,” the glorious and the worrisome, the pope said. “We need such people, capable of weaving the threads of communion in place of the barred wire of conflict and division.”

Departing from his prepared text, Pope Francis said the church itself is “mother and woman,” and while women could and should have greater positions in the church, they are “secondary” to the role all Catholic women have of giving life, including figuratively, and in combining “dreams and aspirations with concrete reality, without drifting into abstraction and sterile pragmatism.”

“At the beginning of the New Year,” he said, “let us place ourselves under the protection of this woman, the mother of God, who is also our mother. May she help us to keep and ponder all things, unaffected by the trials and with the joyful certainty that the Lord is faithful and can transform every cross into a resurrection.”

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“A Funeral Service For A Life Remembered”
WHEELING, W.Va. — Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, West Virginia, Bishop Mark E. Brennan celebrated a Mass Dec. 3, where Ginny R. Favede was installed as the 13th president of Wheeling University. Favede had chosen to postpone this official installation to focus on the university and its students due to COVID-19.

Before more than 200 guests inside Troy Theater, Marieth Arlia, university board chair, administered the official oath of office to Favede before family, friends, alumni, faculty, employees, students and the Jesuit community.

During his homily, Bishop Brennan commended Favede for bringing hope to “a university community that to quote Isaiah, ‘one that was living in gloom and darkness.’ She has done so because she believes that Catholic education at the university level is still relevant in this city and in these times of great social ferment and division.”

The bishop noted that the president faced and continues to face a “mountain of challenges.” He added, “But your approach is not... it’s my job, I’ll put in my eight hours each day and then go home, and pick up my paycheck. No, you believe in the mission of this school, which is to foster faith and virtue among its students and to equip them with knowledge and skills that will make them useful for our society and our church.”

He said Favede is the kind of leader Wheeling University needs and commended her for her courage and compassion to provide such leadership.

Bishop Brennan encouraged her to nourish herself with daily prayer so that “you will have the strength to climb mountains and all those challenges that you face every day, and (the strength) to foster the faith and spirit of Jesus Christ on this campus.”

The bishop ended, “Ginny Favede – you are a blessing to this school. Be stout-hearted, work hard and wait patiently for the bounty of the Lord to appear.”

Following the bishop’s homily, Arlia officially installed Favede as the president, granting her “all the rights, privileges and responsibilities” the office holds. The president accepted the leadership responsibilities, saying, “With God as my witness, I pledge to lead with humility, honesty and integrity, and always strive to make decisions that are in the best interest of Wheeling University.”

Bishop Brennan concluded the ceremony with a prayer for the president. “Blessed are you, Lord God, creator of the universe and Father of all: you have called us to serve you and praise you each day. Look with mercy on your daughter, Ginny Favede, who will serve as president here at Wheeling University. Bless her and purify her heart this day that she may always live the example of Jesus. Bless, too, the members of the Wheeling University community – students, faculty, staff, Board of Trustees and benefactors – may they continue to grow in unity and love as they strive to be a sign of your presence in our midst.”

At the conclusion of the Mass, Favede offered remarks, saying Archbishop John Swint believed the diocese had an obligation to provide students in Appalachia educational opportunities grounded in the Catholic tradition. She expressed her gratitude to the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston for its partnership and support of the institution from the beginning.

“This place is extraordinary. One only needs to spend an afternoon here to recognize it. (It is) the people who make up the fabric of this place,” Favede explained, and proceeded to lift up faculty, staff and coaches, some who have worked at Wheeling for many years.

“They stay out of love, devotion, not just a job – you can find that anywhere. This is a way of life – a calling,” the president said. Among those that Favede expressed gratitude for were the three Jesuits – Father James Conroy, Father Richard McCouch and Father Hadi Samiita – “who choose to be here, remaining loyal to their Jesuit mission and to this university’s faculty, staff and students. Their loyalty and love of this place led them to request to remain as part of our campus and commit themselves to help in saving this special place.”

The students who attend Wheeling, President Favede said, are special. “Wheeling’s students have, in some ways, renewed my hope in humanity. Our students are astounding human beings who possess the ability to change the world.”

She explained that remaining true to the founding principles and mission must always be a priority. “Since 1954, the university has given students opportunities to grow through traditional learning models, experiential experiences, internships, community service and research.”

Favede ended, “Bishop Brennan, members of the Board of Trustees, thank you for the faith you have placed in me. I am beyond blessed to be given the mission to lead this magnificent place. Please join me as we continue to carry our mission forward, guided by our Catholic faith to work together, serving one another and the Lord to make the world a better place.”

Bishop Monforton’s Schedule

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<td>8-14</td>
<td>Retreat</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Mass, Holy Rosary Church, Steubenville, 4 p.m., livestreamed and recorded (Triumph of the Cross Parish and diocesan Facebook pages)</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Mass, Holy Rosary Church, Steubenville, 10 a.m.</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Mass for Life and Candlelight Rosary, Holy Family Church, Steubenville, 6 p.m.</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Mass, Holy Rosary Church, Steubenville, 8:30 a.m. Catholic Conference of Ohio virtual meeting, 10:30 a.m. Eucharistic adoration, Catholic Central High School, Steubenville, 7 p.m.</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>WAOB radio segment, 7-8 a.m.</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>March for Life Mass, Christ the King Chapel, Franciscan University of Steubenville, 12:05 p.m., livestreamed and recorded (Franciscan University and diocesan Facebook pages and Franciscan University’s website)</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Mass, Holy Rosary Church, Steubenville, 4 p.m., livestreamed and recorded (Triumph of the Cross Parish and diocesan Facebook pages)</td>
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Pope Francis says even when rejected, God seeks out his children

By Junno Aroro Esteves
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Christians can rest assured that even when they feel unworthy, God is a good shepherd who goes in search of them, Pope Francis said.

Speaking to pilgrims gathered in St. Peter’s Square Jan. 2 for his Sunday Angelus address, the pope said God persists with his children “because he does not resign himself to the fact that we can go astray by going far from him, far from eternity, far from the light.”

“This is God’s work: to come among us,” the pope said. “If we consider ourselves unworthy, that does not stop him; he comes. If we reject him, he does not tire of seeking us out. If we are not ready and willing to receive him, he prefers to come anyway. And if we close the door in his face, he waits.”

Reflecting on the prologue of the Gospel of St. John, in which the apostle proclaims that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” the pope said the phrase contains a paradox in that “the Word is eternal” while “the flesh” is “fragile, limited and mortal.”

The “polarities,” he said, explain “God’s way of acting. Faced with our frailties, the Lord does not withdraw.”

Missionaries of Charity ration food with foreign license denied

By Saadia Azim
Catholic News Service

KOLKATA, India — Since Christmas, the Missionaries of Charity have been strictly rationing the food and daily use items for their regular 600 beneficiaries at their motherhouse and Shishu Bhavan, a children’s orphanage. On Jan. 2, the breakfast of tea, bread and eggs was cut short by an hour.

“As long as you did it to one of these, my least brethren, you did it to me,” said Razia, a beneficiary of the Missionaries of Charity, as she waited for the nuns to give her the weekly provisions. She lives with her two sick children across the road from the motherhouse and says she visits the tomb of St. Teresa and prays for the “difficult times to pass.”

Abdul Razak, a 45-year-old beggar, stays put outside the motherhouse curled in his rags. He has been staying there since Christmas in hopes of getting his share of food and medicine. A few others like him sit along with him to receive their subsidy from the nuns. Since the pandemic began, they received their daily meal from the motherhouse, but now, “Sisters told us that we might not be able to collect the food any longer,” said the sick man.

The Indian Home Ministry has not approved the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act license of the Missionaries of Charity on the grounds of some “adverse reports.” However, the nuns do not express their disappointment with the central government’s action and continue the routine of prayers and service.

A spokesman for the order said the nuns are looking into the lack of FCRA approval and will appeal the ruling.

But, the uncertainty hanging on the fate of foreign donations has started showing in the organization’s everyday operations. Sister Dominic Mary, a member of the Missionaries of Charity from neighboring Orissa state, told Catholic News Service that, “The state government of Orissa has confirmed that their supplies will keep going in these difficult times. ... If other state governments also support us, maybe this phase will pass.”

Every Friday, Chotu, 5, Abdulla, 7, Sashi, 6, Guhnaaz, 8, all living by the street with their mother, collect food from the Shishu Bhavan. Their father is blind and lives in a makeshift wooden trolley, begging on the streets. In the winter, their only hopes of survival have been the Missionaries of Charity. They were expecting to receive the woolen blankets that did not arrive after Christmas.

“We might not get it this winter,” said their mother, Rosy.

On Fridays and Sundays, the poor line up to get their share of essentials at the motherhouse. The nuns have told them now that it might get difficult for them in the coming days.

In India, about 6,000 nongovernmental organizations — some as prominent as Oxfam — lost their FCRA licenses Jan. 1. When an FCRA license is canceled, the organization can appeal to the Home Ministry; with an appeal, the license remains valid for 180 days. Permanent cancellation of the permit then follows.

John Dayal, human rights activist and author, said: “The FCRA curbs are just a way to restrict humanitarian organizations to work independently in India. It is a kind of continued violence that’s played on the streets by goons and by the government through regulations and misinformation against Christians.”

Muslims have suffered similar discrimination.
Advocates: UN conference a chance to reduce threat of nuclear weapons

By Dennis Sadowski
Catholic News Service

CLEVELAND — The last time delegates from around the world met to review progress toward disarmament under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in 2015, they came away with no consensus on how to move forward.

At the time, the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom — urged by Israel — stymied the adoption of a carefully worded text that had been negotiated throughout the monthlong review conference.

This time around, as the 10th review conference on the treaty approaches, non-nuclear nations, the Holy See and nuclear disarmament advocates are pushing for a strong statement on steps to achieve reductions in nuclear arsenals.

The conference was set to open Jan. 4. However, the U.N. Office of Disarmament Affairs announced a third delay Dec. 28 because of another surge in the COVID-19 pandemic. A U.N. official has tentatively set Aug. 1-26 as the new period for the review conference.

The delay is not deterring disarmament advocates, who will continue to organize for a more substantive outcome when the review conference is held.

“We’ve sent letters to missions. We’ve sent letters to bishops and other people in the Catholic Church urging people to keep pressuring,” Mary Yelenick, Pax Christi International’s main representative at the U.N., told Catholic News Service in mid-December before the postponement was announced.

Yelenick and her fellow advocates are seeking to overcome the influence that a small number of nuclear-armed nations holds over the process in the hope of seeing a definitive consensus document emerge. They said such a document must call for compliance with the 51-year-old treaty’s requirements, non-nuclear negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament.

Jesus Father Drew Christiansen, professor of ethics and global development at Georgetown University, expressed concern for the treaty’s future if no consensus is reached.

“It won’t say the end of the treaty, but it would be a disaster for the treaty because the non-nuclear states have made it clear with their frustration with the lack of progress on disarmament on the part of the nuclear states,” he said.

Illustrating the importance of the upcoming conference, the chairman of a U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ committee has called on U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken to pursue talks that would fulfill the treaty’s intent.

“We are witnessing the U.S. and Russia increase defense budget spending to modernize and upgrade their massive nuclear stockpiles,” Bishop David J. Malloy of Rockford, Illinois, who chairs the Committee on International Justice and Peace, wrote in a Sept. 24 letter to Blinken.

He said the COVID-19 pandemic should teach people that security does not come from a country’s possession of nuclear weapons, but from working together to promote the common good with greater access to health care, a reduction of poverty and care for the environment.

“The ultimate goal of the total elimination of nuclear weapons is both a challenge and a moral and humanitarian imperative,” he said in reiterating the Catholic Church’s decadeslong call for disarmament.

Even with such an appeal, the effort to urge the nuclear powers that are part of the treaty to comply with it will be far more difficult under rules guiding conference participation.

Originally scheduled for 2020, the review conference has been delayed three times by the pandemic, forcing planners to limit attendance at U.N. headquarters to official country delegations. In the past, nongovernmental organizations could attend in person.

Despite the limits, disarmament advocates said they will continue to pursue various diplomatic routes to get their message across, especially because the issues facing delegates are more crucial now than ever as new nations strive to enter the nuclear weapons club.

Susi Snyder, nuclear disarmament program manager at PAX, the largest peace organization in Netherlands and a regular partner of Pax Christi International, said she has been in talks with non-nuclear nations who want to keep all conference negotiations transparent.

The nuclear powers “need to get pressure from others who are in the room,” Snyder told CNS from her office in Utrecht, Netherlands. “The question is who’s deciding the policy (on such weapons). Is it the countries deciding the policy or is it a few corporate interests deciding the policy?”

“We’re unpacking who has a vested interest and then holding governments accountable,” Snyder said, stressing that if nations begin to reduce spending on nuclear weapons they will be better positioned to respond to other pressing challenges to human life and dignity.

Snyder also questioned the lack of openness among officials planning the review conference. She said that because attendance is limited, Gustavo Zlauvain, an Argentine diplomat serving as president-designate of the conference, has a duty to meet with civil society groups and share their concerns at the U.N. meetings.

The Office of Disarmament Affairs did not respond to requests for a response.

Prior to the initially scheduled conference, Yelenick and Snyder noted outreach has long been underway among disarmament advocates worldwide urging divestment from nuclear weapons manufacturers.

“We’re keeping the focus on what do the weapons do,” Snyder explained, saying that the effort will continue after the conference ends. “It’s a reaffirmation that a nuclear war can never be won and never be fought.”

Although they cannot attend in person, the advocates are planning side events online and outside U.N. headquarters to spur people to action. They believe that any future move toward disarmament must be led by average people joining prayer vigils and demonstrations and voicing their concerns to decision-makers.

Along those lines, one U.S. prelate has taken a step in the hope of motivating people to act.

Archbishop John C. Wester of Santa Fe, New Mexico, led a 20-minute prayer service Dec. 19 at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe there and unveiled a sign depicting Pope Francis and a quote the pope offered during a visit to Hiroshima, Japan, in November 2019: “The possession of nuclear arms is immoral.”

The archbishop told the 100 people in attendance that the archdiocese “needs to be facilitating (and) encouraging an ongoing conversation” about nuclear disarmament. He encouraged people to consider “our role in the current nuclear danger the world is facing.”

The Los Alamos National Laboratory, one of the country’s leading nuclear technology research centers, is located within the archdiocese. The laboratory recently opened a small office in a building across the street from the shrine.

Archbishop Wester encouraged people to be instruments of peace and to “pray for God’s intervention” to keep the conversation going on the danger posed by nuclear armaments.

“That is now the time to commit ourselves to build peace,” he said, and “I ask you to add your voice to mine in this urgent conversation.”

St. Mary School, Marietta, seeks custodian position

St. Mary School, Marietta, is seeking a full-time day custodian responsible for cleaning and maintaining the school grounds. The position works eight hours per day, five days per week, and includes refrigerator • heating • air conditioning
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For the complete job description, visit www.

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Infant Baptism, Free Will and Responsibility: Some Pastoral Reflections Leading up to the Baptism of the Lord

By Father Nicholas S. Ward

As a priest in general, and in particular as one of the “on-call” priests who minister to COVID-19 patients, I have become very used to calls from the hospital alerting me that someone is dying and the family has requested last rites. It happens maybe once or twice a week, though I have sometimes gotten multiple such calls before in a single day. I don’t always have the opportunity to administer viaticum, or anointing with the Apostolic Pardon while the person is still conscious, though that usually hardly matters: if they’re breathing, 99 times out of a hundred the family will want me to administer last rites.

Like most dying people at their last sacramental encounter, babies on their first sacramental go around are usually a little out of it. The family is expected to contact the priest on their behalf, and will make responses of faith for them.

This is why in my mind the arguments of the Anabaptists and Evangelicals for the so-called “believers baptism,” the exclusively fully-conscious “my choice” anti-infant baptism mentality gaining so much traction today, simply doesn’t due the sacrament justice. It disregards certain things: First of all, it disregards the dignity of infants, who although cannot express themselves rationally, nonetheless possess rationality as part of their human nature. Secondly, it contradicts one of the fundamental aspects of Christian faith, namely, that faith does not originate within ourselves, but is something which comes from God. Faith is a gift, as St. Paul clearly states: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift

Arrivaderci

By Diocese of Steubenville
Bishop Emeritus Gilbert I. Sheldon

I had been pondering what I might present next, now that I have finished my exposition of St. John Paul’s reflections on the Creed that we recite every Sunday at Mass. Those reflections, by the way, took up four books and we have taken at their exposition a half page in the Register for several years! I considered some of John Paul’s encyclicals that I had not yet presented. I considered a reprint of some of my earlier ones, e.g., one of John Paul’s earliest ones, “Veritatis Splendor” (the Splendor of Truth), a veritable handbook on Moral Theology, as well as others.

It seems, though, that the Good Lord has been taken the decision out of my hands and determined that it is time for me to lay off writing articles for the diocesan paper. My Adult Macular Degeneration (AMD), for which I have been treating for over 20 years, is gaining over the treatment, which is the expected outcome if the patient lives long enough. Such, I understand, was the experience of John D. Rockefeller. The standard treatment is an injection into the eye. It’s not as bad as it sounds, but it’s a fun thing, either. The injections do not cure the AMD, they only arrest it. Eventually, the AMD wins the race. I have been undergoing these shots for over twenty years. Rockefeller with his millions, and I with my two-bits, cannot buy AMD off. It’s not serious – so far. The Lord seems to be telling me, “Quit kidding yourself, Gil. You’re over the hill.” Please say a prayer for me that my vision will not fail, that my AMD will not progress to the eye that I can’t see.

I also have been suffering from High Blood Pressure for the last several years. I consider some of John Paul’s encyclicals that I had not yet presented. I considered a reprint of some of my earlier ones, e.g., one of John Paul’s earliest ones, “Veritatis Splendor” (the Splendor of Truth), a veritable handbook on Moral Theology, as well as others.

My first venture was a commentary on the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which was first published in about 1992. It took me 10 years, ending shortly after I retired as Bishop of Steubenville. My next venture was a presentation on Medical Ethics, inspired by a course I was co-teaching at Franciscan University. After that, I began on the writings of Pope John Paul, who was alive and an active pope at the beginning. I chose his Encyclical, “Evangelium Vitae” (The Gospel of Life) as the basis of the church’s pro-life position on such questions as abortion, euthanasia, etc.

I used his encyclical on the family to show the background of the Catholic position on issues associated with the family and the rest of me finish together.

Some of John Paul’s encyclicals that I wrote up were certainly not John Paul’s only ones. There were many more that I hadn’t even touched. These, however, were because of their importance and timeliness. Not that the others were not important or timely. They would not be written if the pope did not see importance or timeliness for them. The ones chosen are on the judgment of this writer, whose opinion is not necessarily better than anyone else’s. As a bishop, however, he is in a position to make a more informed judgment on such things.

Let me digress a little here, to say something about newspaper and similar overseas correspondents who were accustomed to use radio to transmit their stories. They had a problem, though. Long-range radio was often interfered with by atmospheric conditions: “atmospherics” they are called. That’s because long-range radio communication depended on a peculiar phenomenon: the radio waves had to reflect (bounces) of the ionosphere to get where they were going. At times, a transmission could be cut short or eliminated entirely by “atmospherics.” The recipients of radio messages could not always tell when a piece was in whole or part. The correspondents came up with a way to indicate that a transmission was, indeed, ended. They would place the figure “30” at the end to show that this was the actual end of the piece, and not an ending caused by “atmospherics.” (I don’t know whether the practice is still used or not. It may well be.)

A classical case of atmospherics occurred the day before the attack on Pearl Harbor. Washington was convinced that an attack was imminent, but did not know where.

Bishop Sheldon

Pearl Harbor was a likely candidate. Japanese espionage knew of the American war games in which it was done successfully and how. Defense of the Islands was the responsibility of the Army, not the Navy. At that time there was no U.S. Air Force as such, only the Army Air Force. General (Callevt) Marshall, Chief of Staff of the Army in Washington, decided to alert the Hawaiian Army forces of an impending attack, but atmospherics interfered with radio communication. His subordinates decided to send the message by (commercial) cable, but did not include the word, “urgent.” The result was that General (Walter) Short, the army commander in Hawaii, received the message too late. The attack was already on. Had he received it earlier, Army fighter planes could have intercepted the incoming strike out at sea. All because of atmospherics!

We could get very sentimental at the end of almost 30 years of writing. There are many to thank: the bishops who allowed the series to continue: my successors, Bishop Conlon and Bishop Monforton; the editors, Mgr. Jim Boehm, the editor of the Register when I came to Steubenville, succeeded by Pat DeFrancis and, currently, Dino Orsatti; the many loyal readers of my articles, especially those who took the time and trouble to write in, expressing their appreciation for a particular article; the staff of the Register, who were helpful in so many ways, etc. Just let me say “many thanks to all.” Rather than get sentimental, I’ll just say: 30. (End of transmission, signing off).

Bishop Sheldon

Editor’s Note: Edited versions of Bishop Sheldon’s previous articles will continue to run in future editions of the The Steubenville Register.
To Be a Neighbor in 2022

By Diocese of Steubenville 
Bishop Jeffrey M. Monforton

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mk 12:30-31).

The foundation of all the commandments is our relationship with God. In fact, these very words Jesus shares from the Book of Deuteronomy should resonate in our hearts, for Our Lord invites us into a relationship with him, a relationship clearly illustrated by how we relate to others. I make this remark because all of us are too aware of caustic statements and polarized attitudes that permeate social media, especially as the past two years of the pandemic has amplified societal division. Jesus’ words instruct us to be the adults in the room.

Our love for God finds his expression in our love for one another, and, in turn, our love for one another receives its foundation and integrity in the love God has given us. What Jesus quotes in Deuteronomy is called the Shema or the creed of Israel; this creed declares that every Israelite should be in constant remembrance of God’s enduring love and it was obliged to all the faithful to love God with one’s entire being.

The above passage from the Gospel according to Mark immediately follows the allegory of the vineyard workers as well as the instruction to give Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to give God what is God’s. In the midst of Jesus’ description of the cost of discipleship, he prepares the foundation of how the faithful and effective disciple’s heart must be configured to his Most Sacred Heart. Jesus Christ describes a faithful Christian disciples’ spiritual health disposition. If we are to build up the kingdom of God, we do it with the mortar of compassion and mercy, not the venom of hatred.

Reciprocal love is our response to Jesus Christ, who has loved us first. How do you and I hear God’s invitation to serve as a credible disciple? Are we afraid to allow God to stretch us? Our prayer life reflects who we are as Christians. Do you and I come out of prayer open to God, or consequently closed in on ourselves, raising protective barriers? Do we embrace the reality we share a common journey of discipleship encountering Christ in others? In his encyclical letter “Fratelli Tutti,” which focuses on fraternity and social friendship, Pope Francis reminds us we “are part of the greater human family, without which (we) will not be able to understand (ourselves) fully” (“Fratelli Tutti,” Paragraph 149).

Jesus reminds us that you and I are not centers of the universe. Scientifically, the Catholic priest Nicolaus Copernicus confirmed in the 16th century we are not even the center of the solar system. Yes, religion and science are not mutually exclusive.

Jesus Christ is not only the center of the universe, but he is the source of our very lives. It has been said that what we are is God’s gift to us. What we become is our gift to God. Admittedly, God’s gift is greater than us. In fact, the greatest gift God has given us is his son, Jesus, who has redeemed the world.

None of us is an accident or a mistake. Unfortunately, many in our society or culture are in disagreement with this position. In charity and in the enduring spirit of hope, we pray for them. As fellow Christians, as fellow Catholics, we must remind ourselves we are bigger than our culture.

As we venture in this Year of Grace in 2022, we can double our efforts to show others our respect and love for them. We are called to be contagious with the love of God and to have the Gospel of Jesus Christ go viral in our lives and in our encounters with others. In doing so, you and I recognize we are not far from the kingdom of God. Jesus Christ invites us to be protagonists in the story of human history. What say you?

Stay holy; stay healthy; stay safe.

What Are the Laity Supposed to Be?

By Bishop Robert Barron

Back in the 1950s, Dorothy Day, the co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, began to articulate a vision that was largely ratified at the Second Vatican Council. She said that the prevailing notion of a “commandments spirituality” for the clergy was dysfunctional. She was referencing the standard view of the period that the laity were called to a kind of least common denominator life of obeying the Ten Commandments – that is to say, avoiding the most fundamental violations of love and justice – whereas priests and religious were called to a heroic life of following the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. Lay people were ordinary players, and the clergy were spiritual athletes. To all of this, Dorothy Day said a rather emphatic no. Every baptized person, she insisted, was summoned to heroic sanctity – which is to say, the practice of both the commandments and the counsels.

As I say, Vatican II, in its doctrine on the universal call to holiness, endorsed this notion. Though the Council Fathers taught that there is a substantial difference between the manner in which clergy and laity incorporate poverty, chastity and obedience, they clearly instructed all followers of Christ to seek real sanctity by incorporating those ideals. So, what would this look like? Let us take poverty first. Though the laity are not, at least typically, summoned to the sort of radical poverty adopted by, say, a Trappist monk, they are indeed supposed to practice a real detachment from the goods of the world, precisely for the sake of their mission on behalf of the world. Unless a lay person has interior freedom from an addiction to wealth, power, pleasure, rank, honor, etc., she cannot follow the will of God as she ought. Only when the woman at the well put down her water jug, only when she stopped seeking to quench her thirst from the water of the world’s pleasures, was she able to evangelize (see, John, Chapter 4). Similarly, only when a baptized person today liberates himself from an addiction to money, authority or good feelings is he ready to become the saint God wants him to be. So, poverty, in the sense of detachment, is essential to the holiness of the laity.

Chastity, the second of the evangelical counsels, is also crucial to lay sanctity. To be sure, though the way that the clergy and religious practice chastity – namely, as celibates – is unique to them, the virtue itself is just as applicable to the laity. For chastity simply means sexual uprightness or a rightly ordered sexuality. And, this implies bringing one’s sexual life under the aegis of love. As Thomas Aquinas taught, love is not a feeling, but rather an act of the will, more precisely, willing the good of the other. It is the ecstatic act by which we break free from the ego, whose gravitational pull wants to draw everything to itself. Like the drive to eat and to drink, sex is a passion related to life itself, which is why it is so powerful and thus so spiritually dangerous, so liable to draw everything and everybody under its control. Notice how the church’s teaching that sex belongs within the context of marriage is meant to hold off this negative tendency. In saying that our sexuality should be subordinated to unity (the radical devotion to one’s spouse) and procreation (the equally radical devotion to one’s children), the church is endeavoring to bring our sex lives completely under the umbrella of love.

A disordered sexuality is a deeply destabilizing force within a person, which, in turn, brings him off-kilter to love. Finally, the laity are meant to practice obedience, again not in the manner of religious, but in a manner distinctive to the lay state. This is a willingness to follow, not the voice of one’s own ego, but the higher voice of God, to listen (“obedire” in Latin) to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. I have spoken often before of Hans Urs von Balthasar’s distinction between the ego-drama (written, produced, directed by and starring oneself) and the theo-drama (written, produced and directed by God). We might say that the entire point of the spiritual life is to break free of the former so as to embrace the latter. Most of us sinners, most of the time, are preoccupied with our own wealth, success, career plans and personal pleasure. To obey God is to break out of those soul-killing preoccupations and hear the voice of the Shepherd.

Catholics make up around 25% of our country. Imagine what would happen if, overnight, every Catholic commenced to live in radical detachment from the goods of the world. How dramatically politics, economics and the culture would change for the better. Imagine what our country would be like if, today, every Catholic resolved to live chastely. We would make an enormous dent in the pornography business; human trafficking would be
Infant Baptism

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of God; it is not from works, so no one may boast” (Eph 2:9). Even the ability, the freedom to choose God is something which we cannot give ourselves, but is pure gift, pure grace. Whether we are baptized as children of God without our, the credit, all the prize for the decision ultimately goes to God, which is why we might as well be baptized as infants. In Romans, St. Paul clearly states the primary purpose in baptism is not to make a once-and-for all choice for or against Christ, but to remove original sin so that Christ can enter in. Chapter 5 contains his famous discourse on original sin, and Chapter 6 discusses its remedy. “What shall we say? Shall we persist in sin that grace may abound?” Of course not! How can we who died to sin yet live in it? Or are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we, too, might live in newness of life” (Rom 6:1-4). This reflects Our Lord’s words in the Gospel: “Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit” (Jn 3:5).

Like the Ethiopian in Acts 8, we have to ask ourselves: “How can I (understand) unless someone instructs me?” (8:31). Un- less someone gives us the gift of faith, how can we receive something which doesn’t originate from ourselves?

This is all too apparent in Our Lord’s own example, who wills to be baptized by John in the Jordan. Jesus, the most eligible baptizer, does not baptize himself: Though John is the lesser, Christ wills to be baptized by him only to show us something the Christmas season has been communicating to us from the get-go: Everything we have, even our faith, is pure gift.

Like John, who received the gift of faith from his Redeemer even as he administers to him the sacrament of faith, we also have a responsibility to give what we have received.

Consider the parents of Jesus, who bring their child to the Temple to be circumcised. They did not wait for Jesus to express in words his desire to be circumcised, but rather, recognizing their parental duty to fulfill the law, they became the instruments by which the incarnate Christ is presented to his Father in our flesh. The only urging the Law of the Lord.

What Are the Laity

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dramatically reduced; families would be significantly strengthened; abortions would appreciably decrease. And, picture what the country would be if, right now, every Catholic decided to live in obedience to the voice of God. How much of the suffering caused by self-preoccupation would be diminished!

What I am describing in this article is, once again, part of the great Vatican II teaching on the universal call to holiness. Priests and bishops are meant, the Council Fathers taught, to teach and to sanctify the laity who, in turn, are to sanctify the secular order, bringing Christ into politics, finance, entertainment, business, teaching, journalism, etc. And, they do so precisely by embracing the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Bishop Barron is an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. He is the founder of Word on Fire Catholic Ministries, headquartered in Des Plaines, Illinois. A nonprofit global media apostolate, additional information is available at www.wordonfire.org.
The Holy See says COVID-19 vaccines present ‘no ethical problem’

By Carol Glatz
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis has reaffirmed its support of COVID-19 vaccines with both the head of the Pontifical Academy for Life and a Holy See communique reiterating Pope Francis’ insistence that getting inoculated is “an act of love.”

The Holy See issued its written communique Dec. 22 following the publication the same day of an executive summary by the Vatican’s COVID-19 Commission and a note by the Pontifical Academy for Life; both documents were dedicated to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children.

At the document’s presentation, Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, president of the papal academy, told Catholic News Service that authorized COVID-19 vaccines present no ethical dilemma, while refusing them is irresponsible toward oneself and others.

Archbishop Paglia said the church has long been very careful and attentive to the morality of vaccines using cell lines developed decades ago from the tissue of aborted fetuses. It has established that “there is no ethical problem” for the recipient and no cooperation with evil because of the “remoteness” of the original abortions.

“Rather, the problem is the inverse. The risk is the irresponsible refusal of others” by refusing vaccination against a deadly disease, he said.

All, also, all vaccines for adults and children, he explained, “must be safe, authorized and guaranteed” by the proper authorities.

A boy receives a vaccination dose for COVID-19 at a McDonald’s in Chicago Dec. 21. The Vatican has reaffirmed its support of COVID-19 vaccines with both the head of the Pontifical Academy for Life and a Holy See communique reiterating Pope Francis’ insistence that getting inoculated is “an act of love.” (CNS photo/ Jim Vondruska, Reuters)

Dr. Alberto Villani, an academy member and head of general pediatrics and infectious diseases at the Vatican-owned Bambino Gesu Pediatric Hospital in Rome, told CNS it also is important to remember the ethical dilemma caused by those who intentionally refuse vaccination against COVID-19 and fall seriously ill, requiring hospitalization. This takes up limited spaces and equipment in hospital intensive care units, denying immediate or adequate care for others, he said.

Villani said it also was questionable when people argue that “only a few” people die or get seriously ill from COVID-19, as if there were “an ethical threshold” of an acceptable number of deaths when in reality each single life has value.

The Holy See statement comes one year after the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published its “Note on the morality of using some anti-COVID-19 vaccines.” Therefore, the Vatican said, “it seemed opportune to reaffirm the favorable position of the Holy See toward vaccines.”

“The Holy Father has defined vaccination an ‘act of love’ seeing as how it aims to protect people against COVID-19,” the communique said. Pope Francis also has repeated the need for the international community to increase cooperation so that “everyone has quick access to vaccines, not as a matter of convenience, but of justice,” it added.

The statement comes as there is ongoing opposition to authorized COVID-19 vaccines and concerns about the morality of using vaccines that used — in either the development or testing phases — cell lines developed decades ago from the tissue of aborted fetuses.

The three vaccines approved for use in the U.S. — Pfizer-BionTech, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson — all rely on abortion-derived cell lines, the first two in testing and the Johnson & Johnson vaccine throughout the development, testing and production stages.

In a December 2020 document, the U.S. bishops reiterated Catholic teaching on morally compromised vaccines, noting their use can be justified amid urgent health crises, a lack of available alternatives and their remote connection with the abotions from which their cell lines originated.

The bishops’ document echoes the guidance issued by the Vatican’s doctrinal congregation, which said in its note Dec. 21, 2020, that “all vaccinations recognized as clinically safe and effective can be used in good conscience with the certain knowledge that the use of such vaccines does not constitute formal cooperation with the abortion.”

However, the doctrinal congregation emphasized that “the morally licit use of these types of vaccines, in the particular conditions that make it so, does not in itself constitute a legitimation, even indirect, of the practice of abortion, and necessarily assumes the opposition to this practice by those who make use of these vaccines.”

The congregation repeated the Vatican’s call on pharmaceutical companies and governmental agencies to produce, approve and distribute ethically acceptable vaccines, that is, without using morally compromised cell lines at all.

The doctrinal office also said that “vaccination is not, as a rule, a moral obligation and that, therefore, it must be voluntary.” But, from an ethical point of view, “the morality of vaccination depends not only on the duty to protect one’s own health, but also on the duty to pursue the common good,” it added.

COVID-19 is causing a ‘parallel pandemic’ for kids, Vatican says

By Carol Glatz
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Among the most vulnerable victims of the COVID-19 pandemic are children and adolescents, whose suffering and distress represent a kind of “parallel pandemic” that must be addressed, the Vatican said in two new documents.

The first document, produced jointly by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and the Vatican’s COVID-19 Commission, is a five-page “summary of the situation minors are facing worldwide and how governments, communities and the church can respond.”

The second document, produced by the Pontifical Academy for Life, is a six-page note focusing on the pandemic’s impact on children’s education and other fundamental needs that were provided by religious and parish programs. That document made an urgent and clear call to reopen schools as fully as possible and safeguard and support family relationships.

Both documents were presented during a news conference at the academy’s headquarters Dec. 22. The executive summary, “Children and COVID-19: The Pandemic’s Most Vulnerable Victims,” underlines several dire statistics concerning the rising number of children affected by poverty, food insecurity, violence and exploitation, and setbacks in education worldwide.

Of particular concern, it said, are the millions of children now left without parents and caregivers because of the pandemic.

The Imperial College London estimated that as of Nov. 30, at a minimum, 5,328,500 children worldwide have lost one or both parents or custodial or co-residing grandparents. That would be one child losing a parent or caregiver every 12 seconds, the summary said.

The overwhelming majority of newly orphaned children — nearly 2 million — are in India. The United States is in third place with a minimum of 137,500 children estimated to have been orphaned since the start of the pandemic.

“Governments, civil society organizations and the church must come together to alleviate the escalating suffer- ing of the most vulnerable children among us,” it said, emphasizing that responses be “holistic” and cover “the full spectrum of children’s needs” during and after the pandemic.

The Vatican’s calls for action by governments included: the equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines; strengthening systems that promote family-based care for children; increased budget spending on child protection, psychoso- cial support and positive parenting training; and helping children affected by trauma as schools reopen.

It asked dioceses and parishes to do more to be ready to intervene quickly as soon as families are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly by knowing beforehand which families are most at risk and in need.

The church must continue to ensure family-based care for children left parentless and redouble efforts to find them homes, it said. Parishes can help address rising violence against children by creating safe spaces, peer support groups and programs to help parents and minors in need, it added.

The life academy’s six-page document focused on the “Pandemic and challenges for education: Children and adolescents dealing with COVID-19.” It is the third document issued by the papal academy focusing on those who have been impacted most and require increased care and protection during the pandemic, such as elderly, disabled and marginalized people.

It said minors have been experiencing a “parallel pand- emic” during the global crisis, and “even if its effects are not immediately evident, all over the world the psychoso- cial stress that children are subjected to as a result of the pandemic has resulted in distress and illnesses that have widely differing consequences based on age and social and environmental conditions,” it said.

While adolescents have shown admirable resilience, sensitivity and a trust for science over the past two years, it said there still were many “fragile and problematic areas” requiring increased attention and efforts by adults to help children who have irretrievably lost critical formative experiences because of the pandemic.

Schools needed to reopen as fully as possible, it said, as closures and distance learning should be only a last resort. The school environment provides many of the social, psychological and formative supports children need and too many minors lack the tools and connectivity to keep up with online learning.

Focusing attention beyond the physical risks of increased domestic violence and parental stress or limitations that could leave kids isolated or without needed support, it said.

The pandemic also has proved stressful for some parishes and church-based organizations, which have suspended their usual educational activities, it said. There needs to be “a dutiful and urgent rethinking of the pastoral care of the younger generations” and how the pandemic offers an opportunity to grow in the faith.

“It is up to the children know Jesus, healer of souls and bodies, let them go to him with their questions, their resilience and their own journey of faith,” the report continued. “The pandemic has reminded everyone of the need to face the authentic and heartfelt questions of young people that are their response to hidden and collective evil. Addressing the answers to these questions as part of the initiation into the faith is an opportunity not to be missed.”
‘Caring Crafters’ share ‘God’s love’ through gifting handcrafted items

Members of the “Caring Crafters,” a group formed by parishioners of St. John Parish, Bellaire, and St. Mary Parish, Shadyside, are pictured above creating crafts for members of the community. The “Caring Crafters” meet bi-monthly and have a mission to “spread God’s love to others through handcrafted items.” The group was formed in June 2021 when they made bookmarks with biblical and religious verses. The “Caring Crafters” have made items for shut-ins, residents of nursing homes, hospital patients, people grieving or going through a difficult time, community members and the homeless. Some of the items made include rosaries with instructional cards, greeting cards, fleece blankets, prayer shawls and holiday themed items. The “Caring Crafters” have also provided personal hygiene products and winter items to the homeless and are working on creating a woven mat made of grocery bags, which will be used by people living in tents under their bedding for insulation. Father Daniel Heusel, pastor of St. John and St. Mary parishes, is pictured blessing items crafted by the group. (Photos provided)

Obituaries

Martha Jo Cox, 67, Basilica of St. Mary of the Assumption, Marietta, Dec. 22.
Mary Rossini Ferron, 100, Dillonvale, St. Adalbert, Dec. 20.
Thomas Finan, 80, St. John, Bellaire, Dec. 23.
Ruth Barbai Kenzicki, 90, Dillonvale, St. Adalbert, Dec. 11.
Irene E. Lang, 92, Waterford, St. Bernard, Beverly, Dec. 29.
Mathias Pitz, 82, Stockport, St. James, McConnelsville, July 20.
Madalyn Runyan, 78, St. John, Bellaire, Dec. 20.
Virginia “Doll” Wagner, 61, St. John, Bellaire, Dec. 3.
‘Ruff’ work: Dogs provide needed support in Baltimore Archdiocese

By Kevin J. Parks
Catholic News Service

TIMONIUM, Md. — Staff members at a Catholic Charities’ residential treatment program for children with behavioral and emotional needs were not having luck calming a boy during a recent screaming and yelling outburst. They couldn’t even get close enough to begin soothing the troubled youth.

That’s when Carmen intervened. The 6-year-old yellow Labrador retriever, a trained rehabilitation facility dog for St. Vincent’s Villa and Villa Maria School in Timonium, was allowed into the boy’s space at his invitation.

“Carmen started licking away the tears and the incident was defused in a matter of minutes,” said Aggie Callahan, director of education at St. Vincent’s Villa and Villa Maria School in Timonium.

Callahan, the dog’s secondary handler, noted that the student was able to return to class after spending some quality time with the dog.

Throughout the Archdiocese of Baltimore, four-legged friends such as Carmen are on duty helping their human companions with emotional and physical assistance.

“Service dogs are trained to help with specific disabilities and are not considered pets. Yet they and other animals provide friendship as they help navigate life’s challenges,” Callahan said.

Carmen arrived at Catholic Charities three years ago as part of a pilot program through the Ed Block Courage Award Foundation that places trained dogs in sponsored facilities. She is a familiar presence, greeting students as they arrive and providing emotional support throughout the day.

St. Vincent’s Villa and Villa Maria School serve children with traumatic emotional and behavioral health challenges.

Ezra Buchdahl, school administrator and the dog’s primary handler, said Carmen participates in routine therapy sessions. Buchdahl recalled a time when a 12-year-old girl abandoned by her parents came to the villa depressed and angry, saying she would never trust anyone again.

And “she meant it,” Buchdahl told the Catholic Review, newspaper of the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Developing trust and unconditional love for Carmen was part of the healing the student needed to be placed with a foster family. Buchdahl didn’t think that would have been possible without the canine confidant.

What can Carmen do that emergency medicine and interventions cannot?

“Love!” Buchdahl said.

Thirty miles from Timonium, a small chalkboard sign sits on the floor outside Marcie Gibbons’ office at Archbishop Spalding High School in Severn.

“Doc is In,” it reads, referencing the black Labrador that helps Gibbons in her role as a clinical social worker and school counselor at Archbishop Spalding.

While not a trained therapy dog, Doc has taken on the role of a companion at Spalding. He first arrived at the school as a 6-month-old puppy after school administrators had given Gibbons special permission to bring the pet to school while he was training.

On Doc’s first day at the school, a visibly upset student came into Gibbons’ office. Without prompting, Doc put his head on the student’s lap until the tears stopped flowing. Gibbons knew then Doc was special.

Nine years later, the “unofficial mayor of Spalding” has enjoyed part-time hours visiting with students and staff, making rounds to classrooms.

“Doc has been known to interrupt a Latin exam or two,” Gibbons said with a laugh. Gibbons called the lab a “conduit” and a “safety net.”

“He’s like bubble wrap” at Spalding said Gibbons, a social worker for approximately three decades and a counselor at Spalding for 15 years. Stress in young people was already inching upward pre-pandemic, according to Gibbons.

“COVID hit and broke that glass ceiling,” she said, noting that Doc brings a gentle, calming presence.

In Baltimore, no one would know by Aspen Shelton’s radiant smile and outgoing personality that she was visually impaired since birth. A brain tumor took away the little vision she had left a year ago.

A sophomore from Texas majoring in communications, advertising and journalism at Loyola University Maryland, Shelton relies on Edwina, her 4-year-old black Labrador to help her navigate the campus.

Edwina, nicknamed “Eddie,” also sits poolside while Shelton trains at pre-dawn swim workouts as a member of both the Greyhound swim team and the USA Paralympic Swim Team.

“We’re attached at the hip, practically,” said Shelton. There are anywhere from 100,000 to 200,000 registered service dogs in the United States, estimates Service Dog Central.

“If I leave the room and she doesn’t realize it, she’ll come looking for me,” Shelton said. “She loves to work. She loves her job. She’s slowly becoming to my independence and everyday life. She’s a life saver.”

Shelton explained how her seeing eye dog has what she called intelligent decision-making skills. Eddie knows how to prevent her from walking into traffic when Shelton might think it’s safe to cross a street—an important skill, considering Loyola’s location along a busy street.

Competitively swimming since the age of 8, Shelton, who could not compete in the Tokyo Paralympics because of her brain tumor, looks forward to competing at the Paris 2024 Paralympic games.

Shelton said her favorite thing about Eddie is her bubbly personality.

“She’s all around amazing,” Shelton said, “always bouncing along, tail wagging. I love her a lot.”

Catholic real estate developers’ plan: Build more water wells in Uganda

By Mark Pattison
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — When Catholic real estate developer Nick Jordan made a trip to Uganda to look for the villages schools he had helped finance, he was bothered by what he saw: far more boys than girls as students.

The girls were needed, it turned out, to accompany their mothers to water sources to bring back water for the household. “I was annoyed and angered at how unfair this really is,” he fumed at the memory. “A school without a water well is just an unfair and uneven opportunity.”

“Women and girls are something as horrible as poverty, you have a choice to make,” Jordan said. “Do I go back to being a real estate developer ... or start an organization from the ground up?”

Actually, it was more like the ground down.

He continued: “Before I left Africa, I sat down and wrote 20, 30 pages, which became the foundation for Wells of Life,” the charity Jordan established. “I made a commitment to drill a thousand wells.”

To date, Wells for Life has raised enough money — just from the United States and Ireland — to build 650 water wells in the country since 2010 and repair another 150 wells that had fallen into disuse due to neglect.

“Forty percent of wells in Africa become abandoned after two years,” Jordan told Catholic News Service. “Does that not just break your heart? The only thing worse than not having water is to have water and then not have it be available.”

He added: “Just because you provide a water well, if training isn’t provided with the water well, the community does not take ownership of that particular well and it does not learn how to use the water.”

To correct that, Jordan said: “We have developed a ‘WASH’ program. Water, Access, Sanitation and Hygiene. It’s essentially a yearlong program to teach the local community how to have best practices in hygiene and sanitation.”

For Jordan, it all began in his native Ireland. “When I was a very young boy, 4 years old, my mother would walk to a well a quarter-mile from the house. She would basically walk and carry two buckets of water every day, at least once a day.” From that, “I had a very clear understanding of what water was, first of all,” he added.

“Second, I learned how heavy water was.”

From that school-inspection tour, Jordan was determined to “create a culture where it’s unacceptable for a child to die due to lack of sanitation. It simply should be unacceptable for children to have to die for lack of water, or die because the water is just 60 feet underneath their feet.”

Hopes can die, too. “The next generation that followed their mother are young girls. If they have any dreams, their dreams are crushed immediately” to do instead what their mother did, Jordan said, noting that water “breaks the cycle of poverty.”

Being registered in Uganda, he said, “gives us quality control.” The wells drilled by Wells for Life, Jordan added, should last for 25 years. It costs about $8,000 to build a well, he noted, once a hydrologist determines the best site to drill.

His work has merited him an audience with Pope Francis. In 2020, Jordan was named by the Italian Catholic Federation as the 50th recipient of their Pope St. John XXIII Humanitarian Award.

Jordan has not let colon cancer deter him, either. He said that after having raised $1.6 million in funds, he wanted to let Jordan take it easy and aim for just $1.5 million in 2021. Instead, Jordan raised $2.2 million.

“Our most dynamic fundraiser is 88-year-old Sister Joan Hogan,” a member of the Sisters of the Holy Faith order based in Dublin, Jordan said. “She has raised the funds for 45 water wells herself. She goes to a little church and money falls... She is spending every day of the rest of her life raising funds for water. She is a force for life, for good, unlike anything I’ve seen on the planet.”

But, not only does he want to bring water within easy reach of Ugandans, Jordan said his aim is “to touch the lives of every single Catholic in America.”
In World Sick Day message, pope says progress must never trump care

By Junno Arano Esteves
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Although scientists have made great strides in the field of medicine, genuine care and listening to those who suffer must always be at the forefront of any therapy, Pope Francis said.

“Patients are always more important than their diseases, and for this reason, no therapeutic approach can disregard listening to the patient, his or her history, anxieties and fears,” the pope wrote in his message for the 2022 World Day of the Sick, which the Catholic Church marks Feb. 11, the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes.

Care that respects each patient’s “dignity and frailties” is especially needed when “healing is not possible,” he added.

“It is always possible to console; it is always possible to make people sense a closeness that is more interesting in the person than in his or her pathology. For this reason, I would hope that the training provided to health workers might enable them to develop a capacity for listening and relating to others,” Pope Francis wrote in his message, which was released by the Vatican Jan. 4.

Reflecting on Christ’s call in Luke 6:36 to “be merciful,” Pope Francis focused on the need to accompany those who suffer “on a path of charity.”

Mercy, he said, “expresses God’s very nature” in that he “cares for us with the strength of a father and the tenderness of a mother.”

Jesus is the “supreme witness” of God’s merciful love for the sick, not only in healing them but also in making care for the sick “paramount in the mission of the apostles,” the pope said.

Many people who are ill, especially during the current pandemic, “spent the last part of their earthly life in solitude, in an intensive care unit, assisted by generous health care workers, yet far from their loved ones and the most important people in their lives,” he noted.

“This helps us to see how important is the presence at our side of witnesses to God’s charity, who, following the example of Jesus, the very mercy of the Father, pour the balm of consolation and the wine of hope on the wounds of the sick,” the pope wrote.

Pope Francis thanked health care workers who went out of their way to care for the sick as a mission “carried out with love and competence, (that) transcends the bounds of your profession.”

“Your hands, which touch the suffering flesh of Christ, can be a sign of the merciful hands of the father,” he said. “Be mindful of the great dignity of your profession, as well as the responsibility that it entails.”

The pope also highlighted the importance of Catholic health care institutions, which help to meet the needs of those unable to obtain medical treatment due to poverty or social exclusion.

“At a time when the culture of waste is widespread and life is not always acknowledged as worthy of being welcomed and lived, these structures, like ‘houses of mercy,’ can be exemplary in protecting and caring for all life, even the most fragile, from its beginning until its natural end,” he said.

Pope Francis said pastoral ministry in health care provides an “indispensable service” and that all Christians are called to offer “God’s closeness” to the sick and the suffering.

“I would like to remind everyone that closeness to the sick and their pastoral care is not only the task of certain specifically designated ministers; visiting the sick is an invitation that Christ addresses to all his disciples,” the pope said.

“How many sick and elderly people are living at home and waiting for a visit! The ministry of consolation is a task for every baptized person, mindful of the word of Jesus: ‘I was sick, and you visited me,’” he said.
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Franciscan Mission Associates

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