

THE CATHOLIC
Spirit

Pope Leo Responds to Trump: 'Blessed are the Peacemakers'

By Courtney Mares

ABOARD THE PAPAL FLIGHT TO ALGIERS (OSV News) — Pope Leo XIV said April 13 he has “no fear” of President Donald Trump’s administration and responded to Trump’s criticism by telling journalists that his message to the U.S. president is “the message of the Gospel: Blessed are the peacemakers.”

Speaking aboard the papal plane, a chartered ITA Airways flight, en route from Rome to Algiers, the pope said that he had seen Trump’s recent social media post lashing out at him the night before

the papal trip.

“I have no fear neither of the Trump administration nor speaking out loudly of the message of the Gospel, which is what I believe I am here to do, what the Church is here to do,” the pope said during the flight in a video recorded by OSV News.

The pope spoke in response to Trump’s comments April 12 calling the pope “weak on crime” and “terrible for foreign policy,” as tensions escalate in the Middle East.

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Trump Draws Backlash over Pope Leo Rant, ‘Deeply Offensive’ Image of Him Looking Like Christ

By Gina Christian

PHILADELPHIA (OSV News) — Catholic bishops and lay leaders across the political spectrum are expressing their shock and disapproval following President Donald Trump’s online screed against Pope Leo XIV.

Others have also voiced concern over an image which Trump posted within an hour of attacking the vicar of Christ that appeared to depict Trump as Jesus Christ himself.

Trump deleted the post of him looking like Christ the
See “Backlash” on Page 3

Pope Grants Plenary Indulgence for Cathedral’s Centennial Year

WHEELING — Pope Leo XIV has granted a Plenary Indulgence for the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Wheeling during its upcoming Centennial Year, from April 21, 2026 through April 21, 2027.

A plenary indulgence is a beautiful gift of grace from the Church, the full remission of the temporal punishment due to sin. In other words, it’s a powerful opportunity for spiritual renewal and a deeper experience of God’s mercy.

During this special year, the faithful can receive this indulgence by:

- Devoutly visiting the Cathedral
- Participating in a sacred liturgy, or at least praying the Our Father and the Creed

- And fulfilling the usual conditions: Confession, Holy Communion, and prayers for the intentions of the Holy Father

See “Indulgence” on Page 2

Catholic School Students Honored in Wheeling



From left are: Aquinas Medal recipient Curtis Harrison IV and St. Sebastian Medal recipient Owen Worley of Wheeling University; Aquinas Medal recipients Lilah DeSimone of St. Paul School in Weirton and Milano Ammirante of St. Vincent de Paul Parish School in Wheeling; Catholic Schools Superintendent Jennifer Hornyak; Bishop Mark Brennan; Aquinas Medal recipients Jaxen Dragisch of St. Joseph the Worker Grade School in Weirton, Giuliana Voellinger of St. Michael Parish School in Wheeling, Aiden Glenn of Our Lady of Peace School in Wheeling, and Chase Huggins of Corpus Christi School in Wheeling; St. Sebastian Medal recipients Grace Fairman of Wheeling University and Eli Sancomb of Central Catholic High School in Wheeling; and Aquinas Medal recipient Jacob Perry of Central Catholic High School. Not pictured is St. Sebastian Medal recipient Erin Maxwell of Central Catholic High School, who was unable to be present. See story on Page 7. Colleen Rowan photo

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Pope ...

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"We are not politicians," Pope Leo said. "We are not looking to make foreign policy ... with the same perspective that he might understand it, but I do believe in the message of the Gospel: 'Blessed are the peacemakers' is the message that the world needs to hear today."

Pope Leo added that he did not intend to engage in a political dispute.

"I do not look at my role as being political, a politician," the pope said. "I don't want to get into debate with him. I don't think that the message of the Gospel is meant to be abused in the way that some people are doing."

"The message of the Church, my message, the message of the Gospel: Blessed are the peacemakers," he underlined.

Pope Leo has been a staunch critic of combat operations generally, including those initiated by the U.S. and Israel against Iran on Feb. 28. He also condemned Trump's threat to wipe out Iran's "whole civilization," which the president later backed down from, citing negotiations with Pakistani mediators. The pontiff held a special evening prayer vigil for peace in St. Peter's Basilica April 11.

"I will continue to speak out loudly against war, looking to promote peace, promoting dialogue and multilateral relationships among the States to look for just solutions to problems," Pope Leo said on the way to Algiers.

"Too many people are suffering in the world today. Too many innocent people are being killed. And I think someone has to stand up and say there's a better way," he added.

Trump, writing on Truth Social platform late April 12 said he did not want "a Pope who thinks it's OK for Iran to have a Nuclear Weapon."

"I don't want a Pope who thinks it's terrible that America attacked Venezuela, a Country that was sending massive amounts of Drugs into the United States and, even worse, emptying their prisons, including murderers, drug dealers, and killers, into our Country. And I don't want a Pope who criticizes the President of the United States because I'm doing exactly what I was elected, IN A LANDSLIDE, to do, setting Record Low Numbers in Crime, and creating the Greatest Stock Market in History," the president wrote on Truth Social.

Pope Leo commented, "It's ironic — the name of the site itself. Say no more."

Pope Leo, the first U.S.-born pope, has called for the rejection of nuclear weapons, and there is no evidence he supports Iran having such weapons.

Trump claimed Pope Leo was elected as pope because the Church thought an American pontiff would be "the best way to deal with President Donald J. Trump."

"If I wasn't in the White House, Leo wouldn't be in the Vatican," he wrote.

Several journalists aboard the plane asked Pope Leo about Trump's comments to which the pope explained, "To put my message on the same plane as what the president has attempted to do here, I think is not understanding what the message of the Gospel is, and I am sorry to hear that but I will continue on with what I believe is the mission of the Church in the world today."

Pope Leo spoke to journalists on the first flight of the pope's 11-day, four-country tour of Africa in which he will visit Algeria, Cameroon, Angola and Equatorial Guinea.

In a separate statement late April 12, Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said he was "disheartened" by Trump's remarks.

"Pope Leo is not his rival; nor is the Pope a politician," Archbishop Coakley said. "He is the Vicar of Christ who speaks from the truth of the Gospel and for the care of souls."

(Courtney Mares is Vatican editor for OSV News.)

Indulgence ...

Cont'd from Page 1

"As the Mother Church of our Diocese celebrates 100 years, this is truly a moment of grace, not just for our parish, but for all the faithful," parish officials said. "Come and be part of it. Come and receive the Lord's mercy. Come and celebrate this historic year with us."

Sexual Abuse Awareness Training

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops requires all Dioceses/Eparchies have a Safe Environment Program for the protection of children and young people. The Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston's Safe Environment Program consists of the following components for persons seeking employment or to volunteer, directly or indirectly, with children: background check; receipt of the Diocese's Policy Relating to Sexual Abuse of Children; sexual abuse awareness training for adults. Training may be completed online or via live workshop. For information, go to www.dwc.org, click "Diocese", then "Offices," then "Office of Safe Environment."

To Report Suspected Cases of Sexual Abuse of Children: The Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston encourages reporting to civil authorities first and foremost if a crime has been committed. We also encourage utilizing www.reportbishop-abuse.org to make a report about any bishop in the U.S. If you have reason to believe that a bishop has engaged in sexual misconduct or has interfered with an investigation into sexual misconduct, please contact civil authorities in the applicable jurisdiction and visit www.reportbishopabuse.org. **To Report to Civil Authorities: Contact your local law enforcement:** numbers will vary based on your location. If you believe someone is in immediate danger, call 911. To confidentially report any incidence of suspected child abuse or neglect, including sexual abuse, contact the West Virginia Bureau for Children and Families' Child Protective Services by calling the Child Abuse Hotline at 800.352.6513. You may report anonymously to this hotline if you prefer. **To Report to Diocesan Authorities:** The diocese encourages reporting to the appropriate civil authorities first and foremost if a crime has been committed. The diocese also encourages reporting to the appropriate church authorities. To report suspected cases of sexual abuse of children by personnel of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston to the Diocese, contact one of the following designees at 1.888.434.6237 or 304.233.0880: Mr. Bryan Minor, ext. 263; Mr. Tim Bishop, ext. 353; or Sr. Martha Gomez, ext. 264. You may also call the Diocese's Office of Safe Environment at 304.230.1504 or the Diocese's sexual abuse hotline at 833.230.5656. Additional methods of reporting are available at www.dwc.org, under "Accountability." Complaint forms are available online at www.dwc.org, click "Diocese" on the menu bar, then "Offices," then "Safe Environment", then "Download Files and Forms." The form is titled "Complaint Form for Allegations of Sexual Abuse of a Minor." The form may be returned via U.S. mail to: Office of Safe Environment, Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, PO Box 230, Wheeling WV 26003. **To Report to the Diocese's Victim Assistance Coordinator:** call Erin McFarland, M.Ed., LPC, at 304.559.6742. The Diocese partners with Navex Global to offer EthicsPoint to report other concerns such as suspected financial, professional, and personal misconduct of a priest, deacon, religious, or lay employee of the Diocese or any Catholic parish or school in WV. EthicsPoint can be accessed via www.dwc.org, under "Accountability", then "Report Misconduct" or by calling 844.723.8381. EthicsPoint is a third-party reporting system that reports to civil authorities where applicable and Diocesan authorities, and the identity of the person reporting is protected. Links and information: WV Department of Health and Human Resources: <https://dhhr.wv.gov/bss/services/Pages/Centralized-Intake-for-Abuse-and-Neglect.aspx> West Virginia State Police, Crimes Against Children Unit: 304-293-6400.



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The Catholic Spirit's Print Schedule for 2026

There are 10 print editions in 2026. At right are the names of the issues and the publishing dates. Please note, the publishing dates may or may not be on feast days. Digital issues are published every Friday, delivered by e-mail to subscribers, and posted on thecatholicspiritwv.org.

2026 Print Dates:

Month of Mary, Mother of God, May 15
Month of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, June 12
Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, August 14
Triumph of the Cross, September 11
Month of the Rosary, October 9
Advent, November 20
Christmas, December 18

U.S. Bishops' Doctrine Chair Defends Church's Just War Tradition After Vance Comments

By **Kate Scanlon**

WASHINGTON (OSV News) — Shortly after Vice President JD Vance appeared to warn Pope Leo XIV to “be careful” when speaking about theology and taking issue with his description of the U.S. conflict in Iran as unjust, the U.S. bishops’ point-man on doctrine issued a forceful statement on the Church’s teaching about just war theory.

Vance’s comments April 14 at a Turning Point USA event at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia, come amid ongoing fallout from President Donald Trump lashing out at Pope Leo on social media and in verbal remarks over the pontiff’s opposition to the Iran war starting April 12.

“For over a thousand years, the Catholic Church has taught just war theory and it is that long tradition the Holy Father carefully references in his comments on war,” Auxiliary Bishop James Massa of Brooklyn, New York, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Doctrine, said in a statement released April 15.

Bishop Massa did not name Vance, but the auxiliary bishop issued the USCCB’s “clarification on just war theory” swiftly following upon the vice president’s remarks regarding the Church’s teaching at the TPUSA event.

“A constant tenet of that thousand-year tradition is a nation can only legitimately take up the sword ‘in self-defense, once all peace efforts have failed’ (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2308),” Bishop Massa said. “That is, to be a just war it must be a defense against another who actively wages war, which is what the Holy Father actually said: ‘He does not listen to the prayers of those who wage war.’”

“When Pope Leo speaks as supreme pastor of the universal Church,” Bishop Massa continued, “he is not merely offering opinions on theology, he is preaching the Gospel and exercising his ministry as the Vicar of Christ.”

“The consistent teaching of the Church is insistent that all people of good will must pray and work toward lasting peace while avoiding the evils and injustices that accompany all wars,” Bishop Massa said.

The previous day, Vance, who came

into the Church in 2019 after receiving instruction from Dominican friars, and is the second Catholic to hold the vice presidency, invoked “the more than 1,000-year tradition of Just War theory” in justifying his opposition to the pope’s teaching, in post on X, in which Pope Leo said God “is never on the side of those who once wielded the sword and today drop bombs.”

In the same post, Pope Leo continued, “Military action will not create space for freedom or times of #Peace, which comes only from the patient promotion of coexistence and dialogue among peoples.”

Vance said, “Now we can, of course, have disagreements about whether this or that conflict is just; but I think in the way that it’s important for the vice president of the United States to be careful when I talk about matters of public policy, I think it’s very, very important for the pope to be careful when he talks about matters of theology.”

He argued that if the pontiff is “going to opine on matters of theology, you’ve got to be careful.”

“You’ve got to make sure it’s anchored in the truth, and that’s one of the things that I try to do, and it’s certainly something I would expect from the clergy, whether they’re Catholic or Protestant,” he said.

Vance said he likes that the pope “is an advocate for peace,” but he asked, “Was God on the side of the Americans who liberated France from the Nazis? Was God on the side of the Americans who liberated Holocaust camps?”

But Vincent J. Miller, the Gudorf Chair in Catholic Theology and Culture at the University of Dayton in Ohio, said that the Catholic Church actually does not take an unqualified view of the warfare that took place in World War II.

“The Church condemned the conduct of total war in World War II such as obliteration bombing of cities,” he pointed out.

“The vice president’s answer shows he has much to learn about what the Church actually teaches about peace and war,” Miller said.

“He might meditate on the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus calls for his disciples to ‘love their enemies,’ and read the Catechism’s treatment of war

Backlash ...

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following day, after an uproar from Christians denouncing the depiction as blasphemous, but he refused to apologize to Pope Leo.

“Pope Leo said things that are wrong,” Trump said, doubling down on a 330-word condemnation of the pope April 12 as “WEAK on Crime, and terrible for Foreign Policy,” and taking credit for the U.S.-born pope’s election.

Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, issued a statement that evening, saying he was “disheartened that the President chose to write such disparaging words about the Holy Father.”

Archbishop Coakley said that the pope is not Trump’s “rival,” and “nor is the Pope a politician. He is the Vicar of Christ who speaks from the truth of the Gospel and for the care of souls.”

Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin of Newark, New Jersey, who was part of an interview on Pope Leo with CBS’ “60 Minutes” program that aired April 12, told OSV News in an April 13 statement that Trump’s “recent statements and actions ... convey a grave misunderstanding of

the Holy Father’s ministry and a troubling lack of respect for the faith of millions.”

“Pope Leo serves a higher authority and desires to proclaim the Gospel faithfully and advance the Church’s peaceful mission in a world deeply in need of healing,” he said.

“He will continue to speak clearly against war and other offenses against human dignity and to call for authentic dialogue, because the Church’s witness is grounded in the peace of Christ, not in partisan interests,” Cardinal Tobin said.

Other fellow prelates rallied around the pope in the wake of Trump’s broadside.

Shortly after Trump’s post attacking Pope Leo, Ukrainian Greek Catholic Metropolitan Archbishop Borys A. Gudziak of Philadelphia issued a statement posted to his Facebook page, saying he was “most grateful” to the pope for his “personal integrity, spiritual serenity, ethical clarity and courageous and prophetic preaching of the Gospel and of the truth of God’s love at this time of great moral confusion.

“The world should listen carefully,” he said.

See “Backlash” on Page 4

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Backlash ...

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Archbishop Mark S. Rivotso of Mobile, Alabama, backed Archbishop Coakley's statement, adding in an April 13 message that he affirmed "the Holy Father's role as a spiritual leader who speaks from the Gospel and for the care of souls." He encouraged "all the faithful to be one with the Holy Father in praying for and witnessing to the Gospel of Christ's peace and care for all peoples."

In an April 13 post on X, Bishop Robert E. Barron of Winona-Rochester, Minnesota, called Trump's statements about the pope "entirely inappropriate and disrespectful."

"It is the Pope's prerogative to articulate Catholic doctrine and the principles that govern the moral life," he said. "In regard to the concrete application of those principles, people of good will can and do disagree."

Bishop Barron praised the Trump administration's engagement with Catholics, noting his membership on the president's Religious Liberty Commission, and encouraged "serious Catholics within the Trump administration" to meet with Vatican officials "so that a real dialogue can take place."

"No President in my lifetime has shown a greater dedication to defending our first liberty," said Bishop Barron, adding, "All that said, I think the President owes the Pope an apology."

But when reporters at the White House asked about Bishop Barron's statement April 13, Trump said he had "nothing to apologize for."

"Pope Leo said things that are wrong, he was very much against what I'm doing with regard to Iran, and you could not have a nuclear Iran, Pope Leo would not be happy with the end result," Trump said.

Speaking to Fox News April 13, Vice President JD Vance, a Catholic, addressed Trump's social media post, saying, "We can respect the pope, we certainly have a good relationship

with the Vatican, but we're also going to disagree on substantive questions from time to time. I think it's a totally reasonable thing and isn't particularly newsworthy."

Regarding the AI-generated image of Trump looking like Christ, Vance said he believed it was "a joke" and that the president took it down after recognizing "a lot of people weren't understanding his humor."

"I think the president likes to mix it up over social media, and that's one of the good things about this president," Vance said.

Archbishop George Leo Thomas of Las Vegas said in an April 12 statement that he was "grateful to God for sending us Pope Leo XIV, who is willing to speak truth to power just when we need him the most."

"Pope Leo is calling for dialogue over diatribe, prayer over politics, and diplomacy above destruction," said Archbishop Thomas. "We know that he will be unfazed by the President's ad hominem attacks and sophomoric rhetoric."

The archbishop said the pope is "doing what every spiritual leader is called to do — to pray for peace, to call for the protection of helpless civilians, and to plead for world leaders to end mass destruction and armed conflict in every part of the world."

"God bless you, Pope Leo," he said. "We stand with you in prayer and offer you our loving support."

Archbishop Nelson J. Pérez of Philadelphia said in an April 13 statement that the pope and his message "deserve respect and admiration."

"His continued calls for peace, hope, diplomacy, and the conversion of hearts should be heeded by all," said Archbishop Pérez, pointing out how Pope Leo "has consistently spoken with clarity and compassion" to promote "peaceful resolutions to complex challenges" that uphold human dignity.

Joining the bishops in protesting Trump's post was Ashley McGuire, senior fellow at The Catholic Association, an

organization dedicated to defending religious liberty and the Church in the public square.

In an April 13 statement to OSV News, McGuire said the association "laments President Trump's disparaging and disrespectful remarks about Pope Leo."

"The Catholic Church does not in any way fit into American political boxes. It will always prioritize the protection of innocent life in all its stages as well as the cause of the poor and marginalized," said McGuire. "Insulting the Pope, and all Catholics by extension, with the hope of making the Church bend to American political agendas, is discouraging and counterproductive."

The Council on American-Islamic Relations also offered an April 13 message of support, saying, "We stand in solidarity with the Catholic community in the wake of President Trump's attack on Pope Leo."

CAIR referenced an earlier post Trump made, in which he threatened to annihilate Iran while "sarcastically praising Allah," and said that "the president's mockery of religion is both deranged and insulting."

Kelsey Reinhardt, CEO of the political lobbying organization Catholic Vote, said in a lengthy post on X April 13 that Trump's post "insulting Pope Leo" had "crossed, again, a line of decorum" and that "calls for an apology are well founded."

However, Reinhardt said that "the Pope also needs to understand that many Americans view his interventions as overtly political and aligned with one side of the political spectrum."

Reinhardt, whose organization is publicly aligned with Trump's agenda, particularly on immigration policy, and is not formally authorized by any Catholic bishop to use Catholic in its name, blamed "parts of the media" and "identifiable bad actors" for manufacturing "a large-scale confrontation between the Vatican and the United States, between Pope Leo and President Trump, or between fidel-

ity to the Holy Father and love of country."

Trump's social media tirade against Pope Leo was also compounded by a Truth Social post — delivered 46 minutes later — showing a Christ-like rendering of Trump in white and red robes, laying one glowing hand on a man on a sickbed looking up at him, with Trump's other hand holding an orb of light.

Surrounding the bed were at least four figures appearing to venerate Trump, who was framed by images of the Statue of Liberty, the Lincoln Memorial, the U.S. flag, warplanes, bald eagles, and five heavenly figures in military gear.

"The graphic exploitation of sacred imagery is deeply offensive and undermines the reverence owed to what believers hold most dear," Cardinal Tobin told OSV News.

McGuire said Trump's "use of imagery that mocks Jesus Christ is beyond the pale and is not just insulting to Catholics, but to all Christians."

A number of prominent evangelical leaders and influencers — including Doug Wilson, pastor of U.S. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, and podcast host Riley Gaines — also deplored the image as blas-

phemous.

Rev. Jim Wallis, founding director of Georgetown University's Center on Faith and Justice, told OSV News the image is "the epitome of Christian nationalism," as well as "stark heresy and a pure blasphemy."

"Donald Trump has a dangerous messianic complex," Rev. Wallis said.

Matthew D. Taylor, visiting scholar at the Georgetown center and an expert on Christian nationalist ideology, agreed, adding that the image is "typical of the quasi-messianic status he has recently started to claim for himself."

"I don't see how that could possibly end well," he said.

Amid the outrage, the AI-generated image was removed from Trump's Truth Social feed on April 13. The president told reporters the same day that he thought the depiction had been of him "as a doctor making people better and I do make people better. I make people a lot better."

"I did post it," he said, "and I thought it was me as a doctor and had to do with the Red Cross."

(Gina Christian is a multimedia reporter for OSV News.)

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DOJ Report Accuses Biden Administration of 'Weaponizing' Prosecutions of Pro-Life Activists

By Kurt Jensen

WASHINGTON (OSV News) — More than a year after President Donald Trump pardoned 23 pro-life activists convicted of violating the federal Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances, or FACE Act, and the Justice Department announced it would severely limit prosecutions of such cases, the department has issued an 882-page report accusing the Biden administration of weaponizing the prosecutions.

Some of the items detailed in the report took place in 2020 and January 2021, the final months of Trump's first term.

Additionally, the report, issued April 14, includes emails from Biden Justice Department prosecutor Sanjay Patel, in which he offered to serve as a reference to help the National Abortion Federation, or NAF, with an application for a private grant apparently to be used to protect abortion clinics.

"This department will not tolerate a two-tiered system of justice," said Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche in a statement. "No department should conduct selective prosecution based on beliefs. The weaponization that happened under the Biden Administration will not happen again, as we restore integrity to our prosecutorial system."

The report claims that the National Abortion Federation and other "pro-abortion" groups collaborated with the previous Biden administration to monitor and target pro-life activists, including during the annual March for Life rally and march in Washington.

A statement from the Thomas More Society, the Chicago-based public interest law firm that had sought the pardons, said the report "vindicates what (the society) argued in courtrooms and in the media for years: that federal prosecutors selectively pursued pro-life advocates while giving the abortion lobby an open line to drive enforcement decisions."

Among critics of the report was Kristen Clarke, former assistant attorney general for the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division. "We enforced the law even-handedly and put public safety at the center of this work" to address "the real violence, threats of violence, and obstruction that too many people face in our country when it comes to reproductive health care."

Receiving Trump pardons were Joan Bell, Coleman Boyd, Joel Curry, Jonathan Darnel, Eva Edl, Chester Gallagher, Herb Geraghty, William Goodman, Dennis Green, Lauren Handy, Paullette Harlow, John Hinshaw, Heather Itoni, Jean Marshall, Father Fidelis Moscinski (a member of the Franciscan Fathers of the Renewal), Justin Phillips, Paul Place, Jay Smith, Paul Vaughn, Bevelyn Beatty Williams, Calvin Zastrow, Eva Zastrow and James Zastrow.

Handy, convicted for her participation in a 2020 abortion clinic blockade in Washington, was the best-known of these because of a later press conference she held announcing that she had kept five aborted fetuses, all recovered from the clinic, in a refrigerator. She was serving the longest sentence of any of them at 57 months, and at the time of

the pardon was in a federal prison in Florida.

The Justice Department, using a designated task force, began to frequently apply the law in 2022 after the Supreme Court, in its *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health* decision, overturned its 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, which held that abortion was a constitutional right.

Overall, the DOJ brought at least 26 charges against pro-life individuals under the FACE Act in 2022, according to Alliance Defending Freedom.

After Trump's pardons, the Justice Department announced that the law would only be applied in "extraordinary circumstances, or in cases presenting significant aggravating factors, such as death, serious bodily harm, or serious property damage." It also dropped three civil lawsuits against pro-life activists.

The new report says the Biden Justice Department "often ignored and downplayed vandalism and attacks against pregnancy resource centers or houses of worship."

According to the report, the department under Attorney General Merrick Garland "pursued three FACE Act prosecutions involving pro-life victims and informed these pro-life groups. Because (Assistant Attorney General) Kristen Clarke and Civil Rights Division attorneys were unfamiliar with these groups, they struggled to identify how to describe the victims: Clarke was unsure "whether the anti-abortion folks called themselves Pregnancy Centers or Pregnancy Resource Centers."

The department "closely

coordinated with abortion providers" and nongovernment organizations, particularly the National Abortion Federation, "to identify potential pro-life targets for investigation and build cases against them," it states.

Patel, the report charges, coordinated with Michelle Davidson, security director of the Federation. "Patel described Davidson as an 'MVP' at bringing incidents to his 'attention, often in real-time, which usually result in an investigation/prosecution." He viewed NAF as a 'great resource for any investigation we have that involves clinic violence,' and a 'wonderful contact for (him) as it relates to FACE Act investigations."

In addition, "Davidson forwarded news articles about Handy from Right Wing Watch and her social media posts. In response, Patel asked for names and case numbers of her associates who had local cases pending in D.C. Davidson then compiled information for Patel about Handy, Fr. (Fidelis) Moscinski, and William Goodman, along with others."

However, some of the emails between Patel and NAF

were exchanged in 2020, when Trump was still in office.


One of the pardoned proliferers, Goodman, in a statement provided to OSV News, responded, "The fight for justice is both practical and spiritual. Rescuers involved in the federal FACE (Act) and conspiracy cases now have a new opportunity to speak for the voiceless."

As for Handy, the report says Davidson "forwarded the FBI social media posts from Handy about pro-life protests and noted that NAF was planning to alert other facilities in the area."

Also, the NAF "obtained an audio recording of Handy speaking to pro-life activists and corresponding documents from the Progressive Anti-Abortion Uprising. NAF forwarded them to Patel and other DOJ attorneys."

Red Rose Rescue, the pro-life activist group under the umbrella of the Michigan-based Citizens for a Pro-Life Society, also received a mention.

Planned Parenthood "compiled a Security Advisory on Red Rose Rescues (sic), which it characterized as **See "Report" on Page 6**




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Report ...

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'trespass/blockade' tactics used by the anti-abortion movement designed to avoid federal FACE Act violations.' The advisory flagged its assessment that this pro-life group was likely to recruit like-minded 'opposition' and assessed that "should this movement grow, it will have a direct impact on Planned Parenthood operations."

"How interesting," said Monica Miller, director of Citizens for a Pro-Life Society, in an April 14 statement to OSV News. "We celebrate that this weaponized Biden administration DOJ is finally over."

The national March for Life came under Justice Department scrutiny after the riot at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

On Jan. 8, Davidson, the report states, "explained that with the upcoming March for Life, NAF was 'very concerned that the individuals that participated in the invasion at the Capitol will continue similar actions at this event,' and they wanted to provide as much information as possible in light of 'growing concerns that these types of extremists now pose an even greater threat to Homeland Security than (Foreign Terrorist Organizations).'"

Several days later, NAF followed up with a dossier listing "the names of our well known antis" as (p)eople of interest," including Beatty Williams, a pro-life activist in New York City.

There was no March for Life rally on the National Mall that January; it had been planned for Jan. 29. Two weeks prior, on Jan. 15, the National Park Service actually closed the Mall until after the Jan. 20 inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden amid "real and substantial" threats of violence.

March for Life officials announced Jan. 15 they would hold online events on Jan. 29, citing both ongoing security concerns in the aftermath of

the Jan. 6 Capitol riot and the pandemic.

"In light of the fact that we are in the midst of a pandemic which may be peaking, and in view of the heightened pressures that law enforcement officers and others are currently facing in and around

the Capitol, this year's March for Life will look different," the March for Life said in a statement at the time.

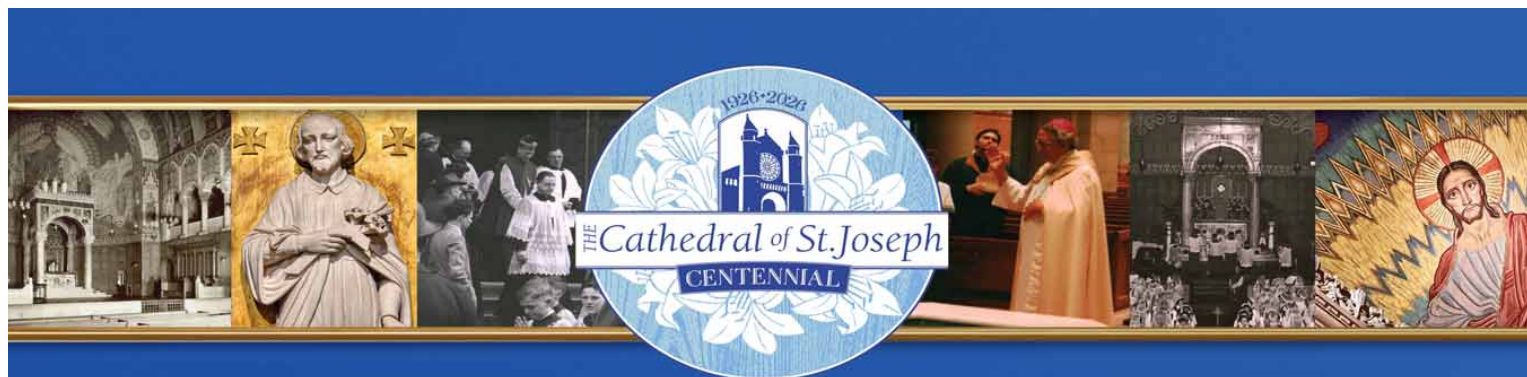
About 200 people, flanked by members of the Knights of Columbus, sang hymns and walked a zigzag route with Jeanne Mancini, then pres-

ident of the March for Life Education and Defense Fund, from the Museum of the Bible to the Supreme Court. There were no disruptions.

Included in the report is a 2023 email from Robert Ledogar, a security official with NAF, in which he mentioned

"attending conferences and (rallies) such as the March for Life, so that we can identify and witness the extremists that find the need to prevent reproductive health care."

(Kurt Jensen writes for OSV News from Washington.)



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Catholic School Students Honored in Wheeling

By Colleen Rowan

WHEELING—The first of three gatherings honoring exemplary students of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston's Catholic schools was held in Wheeling April 9 at Wheeling University.

"This is a great day for Catholic education in West Virginia," said Diocesan Superintendent of Catholic Schools Jennifer Hornyak as she welcomed the students, their families, principals, and pastors to WU's Troy Theater. "We are so happy that each of you are here to celebrate these amazing students who are great examples of the young people in our Catholic schools across West Virginia who are embracing and living our Catholic faith."

The honorees that evening are enrolled in the Catholic schools of the northern region of the diocese and were recipients of the Aquinas and St. Sebastian medals. The honorees from Catholic schools of the southern region will receive their awards on Thursday, May 7, at Saint John XXIII Pastoral Center in Charleston and the honorees from Catholic schools of the central region will receive their awards on Saturday, May 9, at Immaculate Conception Parish Center in Clarksburg.

According to the souvenir booklet provided at the Wheeling event, "The Aquinas Medal is named for St. Thomas Aquinas, the patron saint of Catholic schools and students. St. Thomas combined his powerful intellect with an all-embracing love of God, dedicating himself to sharing an awareness of God with all his students, just as your teachers do. The Aquinas Medal commemorates St. Thomas's dedication to learning and his love of God. It is presented each year to the one student from each school who best embodies the qualities of Catholic school education: excellence in learning, faithful disci-



"These honors recognize students who have demonstrated an exceptional understanding of the gospel and more importantly have allowed those truths to transform their daily lives."

Diocesan Superintendent of Catholic Schools Jennifer Hornyak

From top left: Bishop Mark Brennan is pictured with sixth-grader Lilah DeSimone, Aquinas Medal recipient from St. Paul School in Weirton; Wheeling Central Catholic High School Principal Rebecca Sancomb presents the St. Sebastian Medal to the school's recipient, Eli Sancomb, a senior; Diocesan Catholic Schools Superintendent Jennifer Hornyak congratulates eighth-grader Giuliana Voellinger, Aquinas Medal recipient from St. Michael Parish School in Wheeling; Julie Peroni, principal of St. Vincent de Paul Parish School in Wheeling, presents the Aquinas Medal to the school's recipient, eighth-grader Milano Ammirante; and Maureen Kerr, principal of Our Lady of Peace School in Wheeling, announces the school's Aquinas Medal recipient, eighth-grader Aiden Glenn.



Colleen Rowan photos

ship, leadership, and service to school, parish and community.

"The St. Sebastian Medal is intended to recognize high-achieving student athletes in the diocese. The student athletes selected will have demonstrated throughout their high school careers the qualities necessary to be a well-rounded athlete such as sportsmanship, teamwork, academics (maintaining a 3.0 or higher GPA) and a high degree of respect for school, classmates, teammates, opponents, parish and the community at large. The student ought to be the best example of a student athlete in his/her respective sport

in the school."

Hornyak told attendees that what separates Catholic schools from all others is that they not only strive for academic excellence but they are Christ centered in all that they do.

"Those today that will be receiving the Aquinas Medal and the St. Sebastian Medal are representatives of all that is good in Catholic education," she said. The medals "are a true testament to the mission of Catholic schools here in the diocese. These honors recognize students who have demonstrated an exceptional understanding of the gospel and, more importantly,

have allowed those truths to transform their daily lives. These students are excellent examples of how we can live our Catholic faith and make a profound impact on all those around us. These students are leaders in our schools and in our communities across the diocese."

The diocese and the schools, Hornyak continued, are grateful to the West Virginia State Council of the Knights of Columbus for sponsoring the event and the upcoming events in others regions of the state. She then recognized Brian

See "Students" on Page 8

Students ...

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Gordon, state deputy of the council.

Hornyak gave a special thank you to Bishop Mark Brennan, without whom none of this would be possible, she said.

"His dedication and support of the Catholic schools of the diocese is unsurpassed anywhere," she said. "His love for our students and our schools is very evident and we are so grateful for his support and especially for his prayers."

Bishop Brennan then went to the stage to congratulate each student after he or she was presented the award by his or her principal.

Aquinas Medal recipients were: Milano Ammirante, St. Vincent de Paul Parish School, Wheeling, eighth grade; Lilah DeSimone, St. Paul School, Weirton, sixth grade; Jaxen Dragisich, St. Joseph the Worker Grade School, Weirton, sixth grade; Aiden Glenn, Our Lady of Peace School, Wheeling, eighth grade; Chase Huggins, Corpus Christi School, Wheeling, eighth grade; Giuliana Voellinger, St. Michael Parish School, Wheeling, eighth grade; Jacob Perry, Central Catholic High School, Wheeling, senior; and Curtis Harrison IV, Wheeling University.

The St. Sebastian Medal recipients were Erin Maxwell and Eli Sancomb, Central Catholic High School, seniors; and Grace Fairman and Owen Worley, Wheeling University.

Aquinas Medal and St. Sebastian Medal recipients from Madonna High School in Weirton were unable to attend. They will receive their awards at the Clarksburg event.

At the end of the Wheeling gathering, Bishop Brennan congratulated the honorees and offered a prayer for them.

"Father, bless these students who are great examples and are leaders in our Catholic schools across the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston," he prayed. "May they continue to spread the light of Christ each day to those who they encounter. Look upon them. Their many achievements are signs to us of your goodness. Let them enjoy their learning and take the light of new discoveries. Help them to persevere in their studies, their athletic activities, and other activities and give them the desire to learn all things well. Grant that these students may follow your son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen."

Bishop Brennan then asked for the intercession of St. Joseph, St. Thomas Aquinas, and St. Sebastian.

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Star City Parish Hosts Discussion on Catholic Social Teaching and Immigration

By Pam Queen

STAR CITY—West Virginia's immigrant population is lower than any other state, but also more diverse. That is according to Mountaineers Indivisible.

Based on 2023 numbers from the American Immigration Council, West Virginia had 33,000 immigrant residents that year. Those individuals had a spending power of \$1.2 billion and tax contributions of \$450 million.

Regardless of how the immigrants arrived in the state, leaders and members of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston are exploring ways the church can provide more help to those needing it.

"Mass migration is a common phenomenon. Some in government do not seem to be aware of it or choose to ignore it," said Bishop Mark Brennan. "Earth belongs to all peoples. Governments do have responsibilities and rights to protect their people ... and borders," but, he added, wealthy countries like the U.S. should welcome those trying to get away from intolerable conditions in their own countries.

"Our savior himself, in his childhood, a refugee, said, 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me.'"

The bishop was speaking at "Who is My Neighbor? A discussion on Catholic Social Teaching and Immigration," held April 8 at St. Mary Parish in Star City.



Pam Queen photo
Msgr. Paul Hudock, Hispanic minister at St. Mary Parish in Star City, speaks at a discussion on Catholic Social Teaching and Immigration at St. Mary's April 8.

The listening session was put together by Lou Volpe, who served as moderator, and was based on then-Pope Francis' own listening sessions.

"We have a desire to search for truth and come closer to God," Volpe said.

Pope Francis called for a synod in 2021, inviting "bishops from every diocese in the world to spend time with the entire Peoples of God reflecting upon communion, participation and mission." It culminated in the bishops

holding their own synod in 2023 in Rome.

Volpe said the pope did this because he saw there was not enough deep listening. Bishop Brennan echoed that sentiment in a recent pastoral letter and that inspired Volpe.

Volpe put attendees into nine groups of five to seven people to talk about their thoughts on immigration, asking each to really listen to the person talking.

Those discussions were followed by speakers who gave a look at either being an immigrant or helping immigrants with daily life.

Father Freddy D'Souza considers himself an immigrant worker. A native of India, he's been in West Virginia for four years. He was recently reassigned from St. John University Parish in Morgantown to Immaculate Conception Parish in Clarksburg. He used the social teachings of the Catholic Church to explain his own experiences coming to and living in the U.S.

Father D'Souza's entry into the country was similar to some, but vastly different from others.

"My paperwork was already done by the diocese and I was well-received and welcomed right at the airport," he said. "There

were clear guidelines given to me of my status in the diocese, policies were explained and a timely appointment letter was issued. I was given a mentoring priest to assist me."

Someone with the diocese helped Father D'Souza obtain a driver's license, Social Security number and other documents he would need while living here.

Not all immigrants have that help and struggle to learn what they need and how life works in America and, more specifically, West Virginia.

Katie Luckini is one area person who can provide that help. An insurance agent, she started Latino Services of Morgantown after many Spanish-speaking immigrants found her. She had one client who spread the word about her ability to speak Spanish and willingness to help.

She has traveled and knows the feeling of going into an unfamiliar country and not knowing how things work there.

"You feel like you don't belong here," Luckini said. "I realized this is what Morgantown was like for my grandpa and my great-aunt. I hadn't thought of that as the Morgantown experience."

Now she provides help "with the stuff of life," things like tax preparation, translation services, applying for a tax ID, making doctors' appointments and even going to an appointment with someone new to the area.

She said there are some services for immigrants, but there are also big gaps and things can get complicated.

"You may not like it, but they are here," Luckini said. "Disenfranchising them doesn't make them go away. It makes their lives harder. It makes their kids' lives harder."

Liz Finklea also helps immigrants, specifically international students who come to Morgantown to attend West Virginia University. She said the WVU HomeStart Closet for International Students provides household items

See "Discussion" on Page 10

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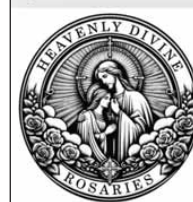
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Discussion ...

Cont'd from Page 9

for students who will be here for two to five years. They always need bedding and kitchen supplies — “some things you take for granted but are so welcomed by them,” she said.

The nonprofit is also always looking for volunteers and cash, which is used to help fill in the needs of someone setting up a first apartment.

Bishop Brennan said the Church has a responsibility to help, not hinder the lives of those in the community. He acknowledged that mass immigration can interrupt society—affecting housing, schools, hospitals, social services. He also noted the myths of immigrants—they

don't commit more crimes and they do contribute to the workforce without taking jobs from others

“I do not make light of problems to overcome but the benefits are worth it,” Bishop Brennan said, reminding all that immigrants were among those who built railroads and mined coal, adding that many doctors today come from other countries.

The bishop said he was marking his first year in the priesthood in 1976, when the country was celebrating its 200th anniversary. That year, the Smithsonian had an exhibit: A Nation of Nations, “recognizing the U.S. is a nation built on the backs of people who came here — millions by choice, millions of others in chains.”

Bishop Brennan called the Catholic Church

an immigrant church.

“The bishops know very well how much our church grew by immigrants who came here,” he said. “We must think of immigrants as real people.”

Also speaking was Msgr. Paul Hudock, Hispanic minister at St. Mary's.

The listening session at St. Mary's was the third, Volpe said. The first had 105 attendees, the second 55, with 62 at St. Mary's. Volpe said a fourth will be planned to discuss what to do next.

To learn more about Latino Services of Morgantown, call (304) 588-1326.

To volunteer with the WVU HomeStart Closet for International Students, contact Finklea at liz.finklea@gmail.com.



Pam Queen photo

Bishop Mark Brennan speaks at a discussion on Catholic Social Teaching and Immigration at St. Mary Parish in Star City April 8.

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Pope Finds the Embodiment of the ‘Guiding Principle above All’ in Algeria

By **Josephine Peterson**

ANNABA, ALGERIA

(CNS) — In a country marred by hardship, deep faith and hard-won independence, Pope Leo XIV pointed to Algeria as a living witness to what he called the Church’s “guiding principle above all,” a charity that transcends power, binds community and makes peace.

Throughout the first leg of his 11-day trip across Africa, the pope returned again and again to one idea: Peace comes not through power or dominance, but through a sacrificial love, exemplified in Christ.

In the Basilica of St. Augustine, his spiritual father, Pope Leo presented the Christians of Algeria as an example of this aspect of the Church’s mission, asking that they remain a humble and faithful sign of Christ’s love.

“Your presence in this country is like incense: a glowing grain that spreads fragrance because it gives glory to the Lord and joy and comfort to so many brothers and sisters,” he said during his final Mass in the country April 14.

In his homily, he described a Church of charity, “where there is despair, she kindles hope, where there is misery, she brings dignity, and where there is conflict, she brings reconciliation.”

“Therefore, in the face of poverty and oppression, the guiding principle above all for Christians is charity: let us do to those around us, as we would have them do to us,” the pope said. “On the contrary, faith in the one God, Lord of heaven and earth,

unites people according to perfect justice, which calls everyone to charity — that is, to love every creature with the love that God gives us in Christ.

In his April 13 address to Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune and the diplomatic corps, he pointed out that Algerians practice “sadaqa” (meaning almsgiving and justice) “even for those of limited means,” and how their “spirit of solidarity, hospitality and community is woven into the daily lives of millions of humble and upright people.”

After being a French colony for more than 130 years, Algeria sought independence in 1954, sparking a war that left an estimated 1.5 million people dead.

The pope highlighted Algeria’s solidarity despite its years of hardship and conflict. He positioned Algeria as a teacher to economically wealthier countries, reframing what development means.

“Indeed, a religion without mercy and a society without solidarity are a scandal in God’s eyes,” Pope Leo said. “Yet many societies that consider themselves advanced are plunging ever deeper into inequality and exclusion. Africa knows all too well that people and organizations that dominate others destroy the world, which the Most High has created in order that we might all live together.”

During his address April 13 at the Basilica of Our Lady of Africa, he spoke again on selfless love, saying the Church’s work with disabled children shows how charity transcends “material help” and creates “an authentic community,

where many people share moments of joy and sorrow, united by bonds of trust, friendship and fellowship.”

He furthered this message when speaking at a nursing home run by the Little Sisters of the Poor, mirroring his repeated message that this sentiment is what builds the kingdom of God.

“Our Father’s heart is not with the wicked, the arrogant or the proud,” the pope said April 14. “God’s heart is with the little ones and the humble, and with them he builds up his kingdom of love and peace, day by day, just as you are striving to do here in your daily service, friendship and life together.”

It is precisely through charity that the pope said one performs acts of martyrdom, regardless of one’s religion.

“After all, it is precisely love for their brothers and sisters that inspired the witness of the martyrs we have commemorated,” he said in the Basilica of Our Lady of Africa. “In the face of hatred and violence, they remained faithful to charity even to the point of sacrificing themselves alongside many other men and women, Christians and Muslims.”

Throughout his two-day sojourn in Algeria, he spotlighted the selflessness of martyrs. Pope Leo’s first stop April 13 was the Maqam Echahid Martyrs’ Monument, which commemorates those who died during the Algerian War.

“Our presence here at this monument pays tribute to this history of Algeria and to the very spirit of a people who fought for the independence, dignity and sovereignty of this



CNS photo/Lola Gomez

Pope Leo XIV speaks during a meeting with Algerian authorities, civil society and the diplomatic corps at the Djamaa el Djazair convention center in Algiers, Algeria, April 13, 2026. Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune was also present.

nation,” he said.

In the beginning of his speech to the diplomatic corps, he recalled the 19 religious men and women who were martyred during the Algerian War.

By expressing this charitable love, the faithful find the ability to forgive and reconcile, ultimately leading to peace — Pope Leo’s biggest priority at the moment.

For months, Pope Leo has been relentlessly consistent on his call for peace, particularly following the conflict in the Middle East. Pope Leo presented peace not as a vague ideal, but as a moral calling, rooted in human fraternity, justice and humility.

To a country overwhelmingly Muslim — an estimated 99% identify as Sunni Islam — he emphasized that Algerians and Christians alike are brothers and sisters because they share “the same

Father in heaven.”

“In a world full of conflicts and misunderstandings, let us meet and strive for mutual understanding, recognizing that we are all one family!” he said to the diplomatic corps April 13. “Today, the simplicity of this awareness is the key to opening many doors that are closed.”

From the start of his visit, he framed himself as “a pilgrim of peace.” The pope said the world cannot continue to “add resentment upon resentment, generation after generation.”

“In this place, let us remember that God desires peace for every nation: a peace that is not merely an absence of conflict, but one that is an expression of justice and dignity,” he said at the monument. “This peace, which allows us to face the future with a reconciled spirit, is possible only through forgiveness.”

Lebanese Christians Mourn Rising Death Toll as War Shatters Communities, Hope

By Dale Gavlak

(OSV News) — Lebanese Christians are reeling from the death and destruction wrought on their community, caught in the crossfire between Israel and Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah militia, a deadly side conflict in the U.S. and Israel-Iran war.

So far, more than 2,000 people have been killed in Lebanon resulting from Israeli bombardments since the beginning of March, in a war that displaced more than 1 million people from their homes and caused widespread devastation and suffering.

Officials from Lebanon and Israel are to meet in Washington April 14 to discuss a ceasefire and peace, but Israel has ruled out a ceasefire with Hezbollah.

Lebanon's Maronite Catholic President Joseph Aoun accused Israel of "perpetrating a new massacre" in defiance of efforts to restore regional stability and urged the U.S. and other nations to intervene. Israel told Christians and others displaced from southern Lebanon that they will not be able to return home until northern Israelis live in safety from Hezbollah attacks.

Israel also insists on excluding Lebanon from the U.S.-Iran two-week ceasefire, already imperiled by the failure to strike a peace deal.

Pope Leo XIV said that he's "closer than ever" to the "beloved Lebanese people in these days of pain, fear, and invincible hope in God," repeating his call for peace during his Regina Caeli address on April 12.

Lebanese Cardinal Bechara Rai, patriarch of the Maronite Catholic Church, has rebuked both Hezbollah and Israel for the suffering inflicted on Lebanon. "The country is going through a critical situation due to Iranian interference through Hezbollah and Israeli aggression," he said in his Easter homily. "Our hearts bleed for the victims of the conflict imposed on Lebanon."

"Together, we raise this prayer, asking the Lord to protect Lebanon," Cardinal Rai urged Catholics prior to April 11's peace vigil at the Vatican, with Catholics joining Pope Leo in prayer throughout the world.

Christians make up about a third of Lebanon's population of roughly 5.5 million people. With 12 Christian sects, the country is home to the largest proportion of Christians of any nation in the Arab world.

Lebanon experienced one of its bloodiest days on April 8, shortly after Easter. Israel dropped 160 bombs on 100 targets within 10 minutes, without warning. Beirut was rocked with simultaneous explosions, with at least 350 people reportedly killed and many more wounded in the Lebanese capital alone.



OSV News photo/Yara Nardi, Reuters
Mourners gather around a flag-wrapped coffin during the funeral of Pierre Moawad, an official of the Christian Lebanese Forces Party, and his wife, Flavia, at St. Simon Church in Yahchouch, Lebanon, April 7. The couple was killed in an Israeli strike on an apartment east of Beirut late on April 5.

"It was a big surprise for us and all of Lebanon seeing central Beirut hit so hard. This came completely unexpectedly, without any warning," Michel Constantin told OSV News.

"These areas, like the American University of Beirut, Raouche, Manara, have nothing to do with Hezbollah. People were killed in east Beirut and near Broumana," a picturesque village east of the city, said Constantin, who is the regional director for the Catholic Near East Welfare Association-Pontifical Mission in Lebanon and Syria.

CNEWA Pontifical Mission has been at the forefront of providing humanitarian aid to Lebanese in the south and Beirut.

Constantin said Christians are shocked by members of their community who have nothing to do with Hezbollah being killed in the Israeli onslaught.

"A politician, close to the Lebanese Forces (a Christian political party strongly opposed to Hezbollah), was hit with big rockets. He died instantly," Constantin said of Pierre Moawad, who with his wife, Flavia, and a friend, were killed in an Israeli bombing on Easter in Ain Saadeh, east of Beirut. The area is far from those Israel is normally attacking. Israel said these people were not directly targeted.

"It was scary, it caused anger, it caused sadness. You feel you are being dehumanized. We are not fine," said Marielle Boutros, a Beirut-based project coordinator for the papal charity Aid to the Church in Need. "We are surviving, but in the heart of each one of us, we want this nightmare

to end in some way."

The deadly strikes are creating a climate of fear and instability for Christians and Lebanon's other religious communities as Israel and Hezbollah embroil the country — already steeped in a disastrous financial crisis since 2019 — in the war. Lebanese worry the tensions could spill into widespread sectarian strife and reignite a possible civil war.

"Towns and villages in which Christians live in south Lebanon have also been violently attacked without any warning. Israel has bombed areas that have nothing to do with Hezbollah," CNEWA's Constantin said of the region requiring desperate aid.

"A tragic incident involved a father, Georges Soueid, and his son Elie, who tried to bring bread for their entire Christian village of Dibil when they were killed by Israeli gunfire," Constantin told OSV News. "Their vehicle had been full of bread when they were shot dead."

Inhabitants in several Christian villages in the south have refused Israeli evacuation orders to leave their homes, fearing a Hezbollah takeover or Israeli destruction.

However, Israel has bombed most of the bridges linking the south to the rest of Lebanon; thus, isolating communities now badly in need of basic foodstuffs, medicines and other humanitarian aid, according to CNEWA and Human Rights Watch.

"The papal nuncio Archbishop Paolo Borgia has visited many of the villages," Constantin said. "And Catholic priests are managing to go to the villages to minister to the people, celebrating Mass," despite the danger, he said.

Lebanese Maronite parish priest in Rmeich, Father Toni Elias told OSV News that he and the faithful now "100-percent sense Jesus' presence and support" as they daily pray together. "Otherwise, how could we manage to remain here," he said of Rmeich, the last village in Lebanon's south on the border with Israel.

"We are facing bombardments and various attacks on the village, but still, we have hope as we celebrate the Mass daily and recite the rosary together. It's the life of prayer and our faith that sustains (us)," the priest said.

Constantin said CNEWA cares for 430 Maronite Catholic families in Debel, 425 Christian families in Ain Ebel and 1,400 Maronite Catholic families in Rmeich. But aid convoys the agency tried to send both before and after Easter did not receive permission for safe passage.

"We are trying again this week," he said.

(Dale Gavlak writes for OSV News from Amman, Jordan.)

Dominicans Who Care For Poor Cancer Patients Sue over State's Transgender Mandates

HAWTHORNE, N.Y. (OSV News) — The Dominican Sisters of Hawthorne, who operate a 42-bed nursing home that provides palliative care for the dying poor, are suing New York state over a 2024 law requiring long-term care facilities to use preferred pronouns and assign rooms based on gender identity.

The facility, called Rosary Hill, serves cancer patients.

The lawsuit, filed April 6, argues that the law violates the religious order's right to the free exercise of their religion as protected by the First Amendment and their rights under the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment as well as Catholic teachings about gender identity.

The Dominican Sisters of Hawthorne operate "in accordance" with the U.S. Catholic bishops' "Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services" and "the teachings of the Catholic Church," the lawsuit states. "They cannot comply with the mandate without violating these sincerely held religious beliefs."

A state public health law known as the Long-Term Care Facility Residents' Bill of Rights for LGBTQ+ New Yorkers and People Living with HIV mandates that nursing homes use a resident's chosen name/pronouns and honor rooming requests based on gender identity. The law took effect May 28, 2024.

"'Transgender medicine' can change surface appearance but never sex. And Scripture forbids lying to another about reality," the lawsuit says. "Requiring a person to identify another by a sex other than his or her God-gifted sex would therefore require such a person to act against central, unchangeable and architectural teachings of the Catholic faith. It would contradict the teachings of the Bible concerning God's creative sovereignty, contradict reason and truth, and betray our sacred obligation not to knowingly harm other persons, particularly

the most vulnerable."

Additionally, it added, "the implications are so much greater than whether to utter the words 'he' or 'she.' Indeed, to demand that a Catholic deny another's sex is to require him or her to affirm another religious worldview."

The sisters' home for the dying poor, the lawsuit states, "operates single-sex facilities when appropriate. For example, Rosary Hill Home will only room its patients in single-sex rooms. Male patients must room with male patients, and female patients must room with female patients. Rosary Hill Home also separates the floors of its facilities by sex, alternating men and women's floors."

Guidance from the state Department of Health just before the law took effect told nursing homes they were required to "ensure that at least once every two years, each facility staff member who works directly with residents receives training on cultural competency focusing on residents who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender and/or residents living with HIV."

The lawsuit states that the law "significantly harms Plaintiffs' ability to associate with like-minded individuals who share their religious beliefs and to advocate their religious viewpoints. The Mandate fails strict scrutiny. Defendants cannot demonstrate a compelling governmental interest in forcing Plaintiffs to associate with individuals indoctrinated in ideology contrary to their religious beliefs, nor that the Mandate is the least restrictive means of achieving any such interest."

It further notes that the mandate "discriminates between religious groups by exempting the Church of Christ, Scientist and its affiliates while denying any exemption to Catholic organizations. If the Dominican Sisters of Hawthorne and Rosary Hill Home do not comply, they face fines, injunctions, potential loss of licensing, and



OSV News photo/Gregory A. Shemitz

A file photo shows Dominican postulant Anna Harper, a native of Baton Rouge, La., and Dominican Sister Carmela Marie, a native of Hinatuan, Philippines, visit with patient Edna MacCready at Rosary Hill Home in Hawthorne, N.Y. On April 6, the Dominican order filed a lawsuit against New York state, challenging a state law requiring long-term care facilities to use preferred pronouns and assign rooms based on gender identity.

imprisonment."

The lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York in White Plains by the Idaho law firm of First & Fourteenth. Named as defendants are New York Gov. Kathy Hochul and four administrators in the New York State Department of Health.

"We have one mission. It is to provide comfort and skilled care to persons dying of cancer," Mother Marie Edward Deutsch, superior general of the order, said in a statement provided to OSV News April 10.

"We do this without insurance or government funds. We do it without discriminating on the basis of race, religion, or sex. We do it because Jesus taught us that, when the least among us are sick, we should care for them, as if they were Christ himself," she said.

"New York's gender ideology man-

dates not only violate our Catholic values, they threaten our existence with fines, injunctions, license revocation, and even jail time. This is why we were forced to go to court to seek protection of our religious exercise and freedom of speech," Mother Marie Edward added.

Rose Hawthorne Lathrop (1851-1926), a daughter of author Nathaniel Hawthorne, founded the Dominican Sisters of Hawthorne, Congregation of St. Rose of Lima, in 1900. She took the name Mother Mary Alphonsa. The order's apostolate is the Servants of Relief for Incurable Cancer.

Mother Mary Alphonsa is a candidate for sainthood, and on March 19, 2024, the Vatican issued a decree declaring her "Venerable."

A date for a hearing on the lawsuit is pending.

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A Knight's Colorful Creation Supports Seminarians

CHARLESTON — A new member of the Knights of Columbus Council 771, based at the Basilica of the Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Charleston, has raised \$1,675 for the Seminarian Support Fund. Alex Urban made and donated an “Our Lady of Guadalupe” quilt and sold raffle tickets during Lent at fish fries and after Masses during Easter Week. Andrew and Leann Price were the winners. Their names were drawn on Easter Sunday.

Courtesy photo
Pictured is Alex Urban
with Andrew and Leann
Price, the winners of the
“Our Lady of Guada-
lupe” quilt.



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When Brittany's husband became seriously ill and could no longer work, their family's routine changed overnight. The steady rhythm of work and home life was replaced with doctor visits, new responsibilities, and difficult decisions. With six children depending on them, the pressure was immediate and real. Brittany picked up a second job, doing everything she could to keep food on the table and bills paid while also caring for her husband.

To help stretch their limited income, the family relied on SNAP benefits and began visiting the Catholic Charities West Virginia food pantry in Webster Springs. For Brittany, walking through those doors was about providing for her children in whatever way she could. The pantry shelves offered fresh produce, canned goods, and other staples that helped fill lunchboxes and dinner plates. Just as important, every visit was met with kindness and respect.

Then in November 2025, the government shutdown delayed SNAP benefits. For families already living close to the edge, the disruption made a hard situation even harder. Brittany had carefully planned their budget around those benefits. When they did not arrive on time, she had to find another way to make it through the month. With six growing kids at home, the worry was constant.

Because of support from Mountaineer Food Bank and other generous partners, Catholic Charities was able to respond quickly. Additional food supplies helped cover the gap and ensured families continued to receive healthy, nutritious options. Instead of cutting meals or sacrificing quality, Brittany was able to bring home groceries that kept her children fed and healthy during a stressful time.

"Everything has switched roles in our family," Brittany said. Her husband, once the primary provider, now focuses on healing. Brittany carries the financial load while trying to keep life as steady as possible for their children. It has required strength, patience, and a great deal of faith. "We appreciate being able to have the food pantry to help get us through the month."

Stories like Brittany's are at the heart of Catholic Charities West Virginia's mission. Illness, job loss, and unexpected setbacks can change a family's path in an instant. Through strong partnerships and faithful supporters, we are able to provide practical help when it is needed most. A bag of groceries may seem simple, but for a family facing uncertainty, it brings stability, dignity, and the reassurance that their community cares.

For Brittany and her children, the future still holds challenges. But with steady support and a reliable place to turn during difficult months, they are finding their footing again, one day and one meal at a time.



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Sister Marie Anna (Rose de Lima) Stelmach, OP

Sister Marie Anna Stelmach, OP, died April 8, 2026, at the Racine Dominican Motherhouse, Racine, Wis. Her Funeral Mass will be held at 2:30 p.m. Friday, April 17 at Stair Crest Senior Living Community's Faith and Fellowship Hall, Muskego, Wis. Casey-McNett Funeral Home is handling arrangements.

She was born July 10, 1945, to John and Jean (Kaczmarczyk) Stelmach in Baltimore, Md. Her home parish was St. Rose of Lima, Baltimore. She made profession as a Dominican Sister of Sinsinawa in 1965 and received the religious name Sister Rose de Lima. She earned a BA in math and theology from Rosary College (now Dominican University), River Forest, Ill.; a Master of Divinity from Immaculate Conception Seminary, Mahwah, N.J.; an MA in in theology from Seton Hall University, South Orange, N.J.; and an RN from Bon Secours Memorial School of Nursing, Richmond, Va.

Her ministry was dedicated to teaching, pastoral care, missionary work, and health care. She taught at Visitation School, Chicago, Ill.; All Saints School, Los Angeles, Calif.; St. Clement School, Sheboygan, Wis.; and Our Lady of Refuge School, Bronx, N.Y. She served as a missionary in the Diocese of Santa Cruz, Bolivia, and in the Archdiocese of Port of Spain, Trinidad. Sister Marie Anna served as director of religious education at St. Patrick Parish, Rockford, Ill.; Sacred Heart Parish, Washington, D.C.; and as director of religious education for the Archdiocese of New Orleans, La. She ministered as a CPE resident at Queen's Medical Center, Honolulu, Hawaii; was a chaplain at St. John's Medical Center, Longview, Wash.; and was director of chaplaincy at St. Mary's Medical Center, Knoxville, Tenn. She then worked for the United States Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Prisons in both the medical center in Lexington, Ky., and the camp in Morgantown, W.V., as chaplain and as director of the department. Sr. Marie Anna then worked in parish ministry at St. Jane de Chantal Church, Bethesda, Md.; was director of prison ministry at Paulist National Catholic Evangelization Association, Washington, D.C.; and was a medical/surgical/hospice RN with Bon Secours Health System, Richmond. She served the Sinsinawa Dominican Congregation as an RN at the motherhouse, Sinsinawa, Wis. She volunteered as an RN for the Dominican Sisters at Stair Crest.

Sister Marie Anna was preceded in death by her parents. She is survived by two sisters, Helen Wyczalek and Jean (Mike) Huether; nieces; and her Dominican Sisters. Memorials may be made to the Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa, 585 County Road Z, Sinsinawa, Wis., or given online at www.sinsinawa.org/donate.



Sister Caroline Benken

Sister Caroline Benken (94) passed away peacefully at Mount St. Joseph in Wheeling, WV on April 9, 2026. She was born Rita Mae Benken on May 1, 1931, the oldest daughter of Edward and Evelyn (Motz) Benken. She was preceded in death by her parents and four sisters, Rose Ann Benken, Jane Kaeser, Joyce Appleman and Mary Ann Mofford. She is survived by a sister, Caroline (Benken) Spahn; and three brothers, Edward, James & Richard Benken. Sister Caroline entered religious life in 1949 from St. John Fisher Parish in Newtown, Ohio, and professed vows in 1954. She holds a Bachelor's degree in education from Our Lady of Cincinnati College, a Master's degree in education from Xavier University (Cincinnati), and a Master's degree in theological studies from the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley. Sister Caroline taught in Catholic schools in the Cincinnati area for 28 years at Guardian Angels (Cincinnati) and St. Mary of the Woods (Russells Point) and served as both teacher and principal at St. Thomas More (Withamsville) and Immaculate Heart of Mary (Cincinnati).



After teaching, Sister Caroline joined St. Francis Xavier (Cincinnati) as a pastoral associate, a position she held for 18 years. She was then elected to congregational leadership and served on the leadership team for eight years until retiring from active ministry in 2007. She moved to the CSJ retirement center in Wheeling, West Virginia in 2019 where she remained active in prayer ministry and sisters' outreach projects. Sister Caroline had many creative interests including photography, liturgical dance and writing numerous published articles on spirituality. She was known for her gentle spirit, warm smile, keen intellect and devotion to her sisters and her family.

The Funeral Liturgy was celebrated on Tuesday, April 14, 2026, in the Mount St. Joseph Chapel. Both the Vigil service & the Funeral Liturgy were livestreamed. Interment followed in Mount Calvary Cemetery, Wheeling, WV.

To offer condolences to the family, or to view the live-streamed services, please visit Sr. Caroline's obituary page at www.altmeyerfuneralhomes.com

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Saturday, April 18: St. James, Charles Town, 5 p.m.

Sunday, April 19: Assumption, Keyser, 4 p.m.

Wednesday, April 22: St. Francis de Sales, Morgantown, 6 p.m.

Thursday, April 23: Corpus Christi, Wheeling, 6 p.m.

Saturday, April 25: Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Stonewood, 5 p.m.

Sunday, April 26: St. Brendan, Elkins, 11 a.m.

Friday, May 1: St. Francis de Sales, Beckley; 6:30 p.m.

Saturday, May 2: SS Peter & Paul, Oak Hill, 5:30 p.m.

Sunday, May 3: St. Catherine of Siena, Ronceverte, 11 a.m.

Saturday, May 9: Immaculate Conception, Clarksburg, 4:30 p.m.

Sunday, May 10: St. Joseph the Worker, Weirton, 7 p.m.

Monday, May 11: St. Michael, Wheeling, 5:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 13: Immaculate Conception, Fairmont, 6 p.m.

Saturday, May 16: St. Vincent de Paul, Wheeling, 5 p.m.

Sunday, May 17: St. Jude, Glen Dale, 9 a.m.

Friday, May 22: Epiphany of the Lord, Moorefield, 6 p.m.

Saturday, May 23: St. Leo, Inwood, 5 p.m.

Sunday, May 24: St. Bernadette, Hedgesville, 11 a.m.

Sunday, May 24: St. Joseph, Martinsburg, 4 p.m.

Saturday, June 6: Basilica of the Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Charleston, 5:30 p.m.

Sunday, June 14: St. Matthew / Sacred Heart Mission, Point Pleasant, 11:15 a.m.

Saturday, June 20: St. Sebastian, Kingwood, 6 p.m.

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El Papa León responde a Trump: 'Bienaventurados los constructores de paz'

Por Courtney Mares

A BORDO DEL VUELO PAPALA ARGEL (OSV News) -- El Papa León XIV dijo el 13 de abril que no teme a la administración del presidente Donald Trump y respondió a las críticas de Trump diciendo a los periodistas que su mensaje para el presidente de EE.UU. es "el mensaje del Evangelio: Bienaventurados los constructores de paz".

Hablando con periodistas a bordo del avión papal, un vuelo fletado de ITA Airways, en ruta de Roma a Argel, la capital de Argelia, el Papa León dijo que había visto la reciente publicación de Trump en las redes sociales en la que lo arremetía la noche anterior al viaje papal.

"No le tengo miedo a la administración de Trump, ni de hablar en voz alta del mensaje del Evangelio" por el que trabaja la Iglesia, dijo el Papa durante el vuelo en un video grabado por OSV News. "Creo que es a lo que estoy llamado, y a lo que la Iglesia está llamada".

El Papa pronunció esas palabras en respuesta a los comentarios de Trump del 12 de abril, en los que calificó al Papa de "débil ante el crimen" y "terrible en política exterior", mientras las tensiones se intensifican en el Medio Oriente.

"No somos políticos", dijo el Papa León. "No buscamos hacer política exterior... con la misma perspectiva con la que él podría entenderla, pero sí creo

en el mensaje del Evangelio: 'bienaventurados los que trabajan por la paz' es el mensaje que el mundo necesita escuchar hoy".

El Papa León agregó que no tenía intención de involucrarse en una disputa política.

"No considero mi papel como el de un político, no soy un político", dijo el Santo Padre. "No quiero entrar en un debate con él. No creo que se deba abusar del mensaje del Evangelio como algunos están haciendo".

"El mensaje de la Iglesia, mi mensaje, el mensaje del Evangelio: Bienaventurados los constructores de paz", subrayó.

El Papa León ha sido un firme crítico de las operaciones militares en general, incluidas las iniciadas por Estados Unidos e Israel contra Irán el 28 de febrero. También condenó la amenaza de Trump de aniquilar a toda la civilización iraní, de la que el presidente se retractó posteriormente, alegando las negociaciones con mediadores pakistaníes.

El pontífice celebró una vigilia especial de oración por la paz en la Basílica de San Pedro el 11 de abril.

"Seguiré alzando la voz contra la guerra, tratando de promover la paz, fomentando el diálogo y las relaciones multilaterales entre los Estados para buscar soluciones justas a los problemas", dijo el Papa León de camino a

Argel.

"Hay demasiada gente sufriendo en el mundo hoy en día. Demasiados inocentes han sido asesinados y creo que alguien debe levantarse y decir que hay un camino mejor", añadió.

Trump, en un mensaje publicado en la plataforma Truth Social en la noche del 12 de abril, dijo que no quería "un Papa que piense que está bien que Irán tenga un arma nuclear".

"No quiero un Papa que piense que es terrible que Estados Unidos haya atacado a Venezuela, un país que enviaba cantidades masivas de drogas a Estados Unidos y, lo que es peor, vaciaba sus prisiones, incluyendo a asesinos, narcotraficantes y homicidas, para enviarlos a nuestro país. Y no quiero un Papa que critique al presidente de los Estados Unidos porque estoy haciendo exactamente lo que me eligieron, POR MAYORÍA APLASTANTE, para hacer: establecer cifras récord de baja criminalidad y crear el mejor mercado bursátil de la historia", escribió el presidente en Truth Social.

El Papa León comentó: "Es irónico... el nombre mismo del sitio (web). No hay más que decir".

El Papa León, el primer pontífice nacido en Estados Unidos, ha hecho un llamado al rechazo de las armas nucleares, y no hay pruebas de que apoye que Irán posea tales armas.

Trump afirmó que el Papa León fue

elegido Papa porque la Iglesia pensó que un pontífice estadounidense sería "la mejor manera de lidiar con el presidente Donald J. Trump".

"Si yo no estuviera en la Casa Blanca, Leo no estaría en el Vaticano", escribió.

Varios periodistas a bordo del avión preguntaron al Papa León sobre los comentarios de Trump, a lo que el Papa explicó: "Poner mi mensaje al mismo nivel que lo que el presidente ha intentado hacer aquí, creo que es no entender cuál es el mensaje del Evangelio, y lamento escuchar eso, pero continuaré con lo que creo que es la misión de la Iglesia en el mundo de hoy".

El Papa León habló con los periodistas durante el primer vuelo de su gira de 11 días por cuatro países de África, en la que visitará Argelia, Camerún, Angola y Guinea Ecuatorial.

En una declaración separada a última hora del 12 de abril, el arzobispo Paul S. Coakley de Oklahoma City, presidente de la Conferencia de Obispos Católicos de Estados Unidos, dijo que estaba "desanimado" por los comentarios de Trump.

"El Papa León no es su rival; ni el Papa es un político", dijo el arzobispo Coakley. "Es el Vicario de Cristo que habla desde la verdad del Evangelio y por el cuidado de las almas".

(Courtney Mares es la editora del Vaticano para OSV News.)

Para denunciar presuntos casos de abuso sexual de menores:

La diócesis de Wheeling-Charleston te exhorta a denunciar cualquier delito ante las autoridades civiles. Para realizar una denuncia en contra de cualquier obispo en todos los Estados Unidos, favor de reportarlo en la página web www.repostbishopabuse.org. Y si, además, existen motivos para creer que un obispo ha cometido alguna conducta sexual inapropiada favor de comunicarse con las autoridades civiles de la jurisdicción correspondiente y también puede realizar un reporte en la página web antes mencionada. **Para informar a las autoridades civiles:** comuníquese con la policía local; los números varían según su ubicación. Si considera que alguien está en peligro inmediato, favor de llamar al 911. Para informar de forma confidencial sobre cualquier sospecha de abuso o negligencia infantil, incluido el abuso sexual, favor de comunicarse con la Oficina de Servicios de Protección Infantil de Niños y Familias de West Virginia, llamando a la línea directa de abuso infantil al 1-800.352.6513. **Para informar a las autoridades diocesanas:** La diócesis exhorta a informar primeramente a las autoridades civiles correspondientes, cuando la denuncia incluye un delito, y también alienta a informar a las autoridades eclesiales correspondientes. Para reportar casos sospechosos de abuso sexual de menores por parte del personal de la Diócesis de Wheeling-Charleston, comuníquese directamente con la diócesis a los teléfonos 1.888.434.6237 o 304.233.0880 para hablar con cualquiera de las siguientes personas asignadas: Sr. Bryan Minor, ext. 263; Sr. Tim Bishop, ext. 353; y si desea hablar en español con Sor Martha Gómez, ext. 264. También puede llamar a la Oficina de Ambiente Seguro de la diócesis al 304.230.1504 o a la línea

directa de abuso sexual de la diócesis al 833.230.5656. Los formularios de quejas están disponibles en línea en la página web www.dwc.org, favor de hacer clic en "Diócesis" en la barra de menú, luego en "Oficinas", en "Ambiente seguro" y en "Descargar archivos y formularios". El formulario se titula "Formulario de queja para denuncias de abuso sexual de menores". El formulario se puede enviar por correo en Estados Unidos a: Office of Safe Environment, Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, PO Box 230, Wheeling WV 26003. **Para informar al Coordinador de Asistencia a Víctimas de la Diócesis:** Favor de llamar a Erin McFarland, M.Ed., LPC, al 304.559.6742. Además de las vías mencionadas anteriormente para denunciar el abuso sexual, la diócesis se ha asociado con la compañía Navex Global que ofrece la plataforma EthicsPoint para informar cualquier inquietud adicional, como sospecha de mala conducta financiera, profesional y personal de un sacerdote, diacono, religioso, o empleado laico de la diócesis o cualquier parroquia o escuela católica en West Virginia. Puede acceder a la plataforma EthicsPoint a través de la página web www.dwc.org, en "Rendición de cuentas", luego "Informar mala conducta" o llamando al 844.723.8381. EthicsPoint es una herramienta de denuncia confidencial y anónima, ellos se encargarán de transmitir su denuncia directamente a las autoridades civiles y a las autoridades diocesanas correspondientes, y lo más importante al denunciar a través de ellos, la identidad de la persona que denuncia está protegida. **Enlaces e información:** Departamento de Salud y Recursos Humanos de WV: <https://www.wvdhhr.org/report.asp>. Policía Estatal de Virginia Occidental, Unidad de crímenes contra a menores: 304-293-6400.



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8:30 WVNS FOX 59	Beckley-Bluefield-Oak Hill (Lewisburg)
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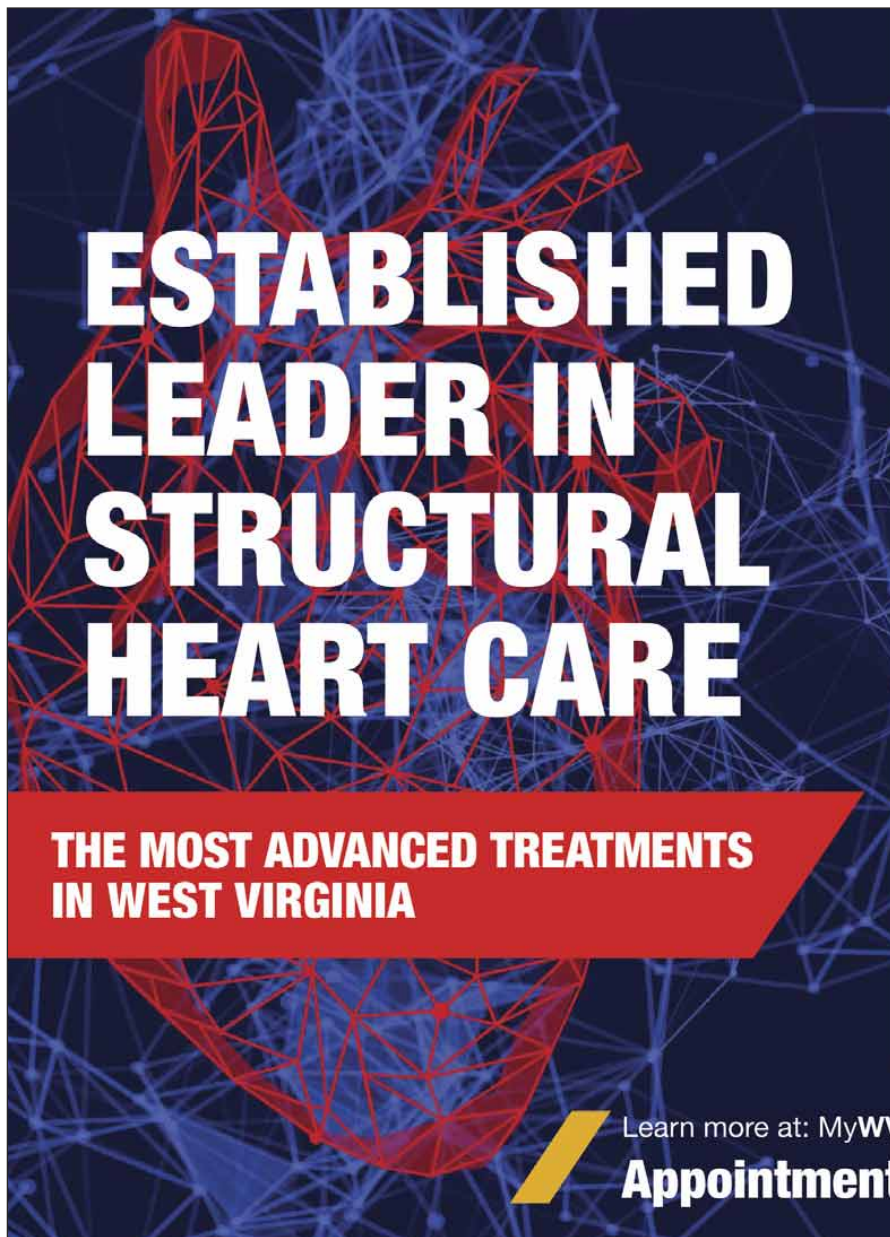
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