

THE CATHOLIC
Spirit

Pope Calls for End to Foreign Debt, Death Penalty Ahead of Jubilee Year

By Carol Glatz, Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Pope Francis has called on all nations to eliminate the death penalty, to divert a fixed percentage of arms spending to a global fund to fight hunger and climate change, and to cancel the international debt of developing nations as concrete ways to usher in a new era of hope.

“Sporadic acts of philanthropy are not enough. Cultural and structural changes are necessary, so that enduring change may come about,” the pope said in his message for World Peace Day 2025.

The message, “Forgive us our trespasses: grant us your peace,” was released Dec. 12 at a Vatican news conference ahead of the Jan. 1 commemoration.

Offering his “cordial good wishes for the New Year to the heads of state and government, to the leaders of international organizations, to the leaders of the various religions and to every person of goodwill,” the pope made three proposals for bringing about “much-needed changes” during the Jubilee Year, which focuses on “Pilgrims of Hope.”

The proposals, he wrote, are “capable of restoring dignity to the lives of entire peoples and enabling them to set out anew on the journey of hope.”

The first proposal, he wrote, is renewing the appeal launched by St. John Paul II for the Holy Year 2000 to consider “reducing substantially, if not canceling outright, the international debt which seriously threatens the future of many nations.”

Foreign debt, Pope Francis wrote, “has become a means of control whereby certain governments and private financial institutions of the richer countries unscrupulously and indiscriminately exploit the human and natural resources of poorer countries, simply to satisfy the demands of their own markets.”

Pope Francis also said wealthier nations must recognize their own “ecological debt” to the global south due to the exploitation of resources, the destruction of ecosystems and the effects of climate change. “The more prosperous countries ought to feel called to do everything possible to

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Advent Giving Tree Supports Stone Soup Kitchen in Parkersburg

Courtesy photo

The Advent Giving Tree at St. Michael Parish in Vienna is surrounded by provisions donated by parishioners for the Stone Soup Kitchen in downtown Parkersburg. This ministry, based at St. Francis Xavier Church in Parkersburg, provides food for the hungry. The kitchen is staffed by volunteers from these two parishes as well as St. Margaret Mary Parish in Parkersburg and St. Monica Mission in Lubek. The kitchen is open Wednesdays from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the St. Francis Parish Hall. Parishes and missions of the diocese also sponsor Giving Trees, Angel Trees, and more to help those in need during the Advent Season.

End...

Cont'd from Page 1

forgive the debts of those countries that are in no condition to repay the amount they owe."

"A new financial framework must be devised, leading to the creation of a global financial charter based on solidarity and harmony between peoples," he wrote, so that debt forgiveness is not just "an isolated act of charity that simply reboots the vicious cycle of financing and indebtedness."

The pope's second proposal is for "a firm commitment" to respecting "the dignity of human life from conception to natural death, so that each person can cherish his or her own life and all may look with hope to a future of prosperity and happiness for themselves and for their children."

"Without hope for the future, it becomes hard for the young to look forward to bringing new lives into the world," he wrote. And a "concrete gesture that can help foster the culture of life" is the elimination of the death penalty in all nations.

The death penalty "not only compromises the inviolability of life but eliminates every human hope of forgiveness and rehabilitation," he wrote.

The pope's third appeal follows "in the footsteps of St. Paul VI and Benedict XVI," he wrote. "In this time marked by wars, let us use at least a fixed percentage of the money earmarked for armaments to establish a global fund."

The fund should finance initiatives "to eradicate hunger" and facilitate educational activities in poor countries to promote sustainable development and combat climate change, he wrote. "We need to work at eliminating every pretext that encourages young people to regard their future as hopeless or dominated by the thirst to avenge the blood of their dear ones."

Cardinal Michael Czerny, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, told reporters at the Vatican Dec. 12 that Caritas Internationalis was launching a global campaign called "'Turn debt into hope' with a global petition aimed at raising awareness about the systemic change needed."

The Jubilee Year and the Christian call for conversion are invitations, not "to a moralistic effort at self-improvement, but to a radical change in how we look at reality," he said.

"Conversion is a path traced by that

love for Christ that inspires, transforms, orients, energizes us," the cardinal said. Faith in the merciful and providential hands of God "frees our hearts from anguish, to respond and to serve."

Krisanne Vaillancourt Murphy, executive director of Catholic Mobilizing Network, which promotes restorative justice and the end to capital punishment, said "the death penalty's very existence epitomizes a throwaway culture."

"Capital punishment is a 'structural sin' existing in at least 55 nations across the globe, where nearly 28,000 people find themselves on death row," she told reporters, adding that this number "does not include cases in countries where there are no official statistics reported."

In the United States, in addition to the federal death penalty, "27 of the 50 states have the death penalty," she said.

Also speaking at the news conference was Vito Alfieri Fontana, an engineer who worked at Italian companies producing grenades and anti-tank and anti-personnel mines.

He said he experienced a personal conversion and began working for the International Campaign to Ban Landmines after his children kept asking about what he did and why, and amid growing public opposition to the use of anti-personnel mines and the promptings of the late Father Tonino Bello to reflect on his life.

"What for me had been normal, became a burden," he said. He was able to emerge from "a privileged bubble — home to 1% of the population who produce, control and distribute arms" — and enter into the world of the 99% — those who do not want war and want to live in peace.

Pope Francis said in his message that the jubilee tradition is meant to remind all people, "rich and poor alike, that no one comes into this world doomed to oppression: all of us are brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of the same Father, born to live in freedom, in accordance with the Lord's will."

Christians "feel bound to cry out and denounce the many situations in which the earth is exploited and our neighbors oppressed," he wrote.

Calling for and implementing concrete solutions to systemic injustice is part of the Christian desire to "break the bonds of injustice and to proclaim God's justice," he added.

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.reportbishopabuse.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://www.wvdhhr.org/report.asp>. West Virginia State Police, Crimes Against Children Unit: 304-293-6400.



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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."

The Catholic Spirit's Print Schedule for 2024

Christmas

Feast Day, December 25

The Catholic Spirit publication date for this issue is December 20

(Digital issues will continue to be published by date every Friday, delivered by e-mail and posted on thecatholicspiritwv.org)



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Pope: Mary's Motherhood is the Essence of Guadalupe

By Justin McLellan, Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Reducing the message of Our Lady of Guadalupe to anything other than an expression of Mary's universal motherhood diminishes the true essence of the iconic Marian devotion, Pope Francis said.

"The mystery of Guadalupe is to venerate her and to hear in our ears: 'Am I not here, I who am your mother?'" the pope said, referencing the words Mary is said to have spoken to St. Juan Diego.

"This is the whole message of Guadalupe. All others are ideologies," he said in his homily at Mass for the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe in St. Peter's Basilica.

Pope Francis presided over the Mass while seated, delivering a brief homily without reading from a prepared text. Cardinal Robert F. Prevost, prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops and president of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, was the main celebrant at the altar.

"On this mystery of Guadalupe, unfortunately many ideologies have sought to derive ideological benefit," the pope said in Spanish, recalling that the true message of Guadalupe lies in its simplicity.

Devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe is deeply rooted in Latin America and connected to 16th-century Marian apparitions in Mexico. According to tradition, Mary appeared to St. Juan Diego, an Indigenous Mexican, and left her image imprinted on his cloak. The image depicts Mary as pregnant, and it is said that roses — foreign to the region — miraculously spilled from his cloak when he presented it to the bishop.

"Mary's motherhood is recorded on that cloak, that simple cloak," Pope Francis said. "Mary's motherhood is shown in the beauty of the roses that the Indian finds and takes with him, and Mary's motherhood performs the miracle of bringing faith to the somewhat incredulous hearts of prelates."

The mystery of the Marian apparitions in Mexico, the pope said, is to hear Mary's message to St. Juan Diego — "Am I not here, I who am your mother?" — in "the different moments of life, the various difficult moments of life, the joyful moments of life, the ordinary moments of life."

The Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City, which displays the cloak on which Mary's image appeared, draws some 20 million pilgrims each year. Inscribed above its entrance are the words Mary is said to have spoken to St. Juan Diego.

"Anything else that is said about the mystery of Guadalupe beyond this is false and seeks to exploit it for ideologies," Pope Francis said.

The Mass, celebrated in Spanish, included a reading from St. Paul's letter to the Galatians read in Portuguese. U.S.-born Cardinal Prevost, who previously served as a bishop in Peru, venerated an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe with incense upon arriving at the altar.

Among those presenting the gifts during Mass were people wearing traditional Andean headwear, an alpaca wool poncho and a woman with a cloak bearing the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe draped around her back.

After Mass, the pope spent ample time greeting the faithful as he left the basilica in a wheelchair, blessing and receiving images of Our Lady of Guadalupe.



Flor Prianti photo
A beautiful display is set up for the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the chapel at the chancery in Wheeling.

With Assad's Fall, Syria's Papal Nuncio Prays for Nation's Reconciliation, New Prosperity

By Gina Christian, OSV News

(OSV News) — The apostolic nuncio to Syria says he hopes the war-torn nation will “move toward reconciliation” and at least “some prosperity” under democratic rule, following former Syrian President Bashar Assad's ouster in a lightning offensive by rebel groups.

Cardinal Mario Zenari spoke with Vatican News hours after rebels entered the capital of Damascus, which Assad was reported to have fled sometime on Dec. 8, after being absent from the public eye during most of the rebels' two-week campaign. Assad and his family are now in Moscow and have been granted asylum there, according to state media in Russia, a key backer of the Assad regime.

Cardinal Zenari told Vatican News he had been unable to sleep amid the “constant gunfire” in Damascus, but noted the “shooting in the streets” was “celebratory” amid a stunning transition of power that happened without a bloody contest for the capital.

Syrian Prime Minister Mohammad Ghazi al-Jalali said in a recorded video message posted Dec. 8 that he was “ready to cooperate with any leadership chosen by the people, and provide all possible support to ensure a smooth and systematic transition of government tasks, and the preservation of state facilities.”

The rebel offensive ended the five-decade rule of the Assad family, which has been marked by violent repression and brutal crackdowns on dissent. During his three decades in power, Assad's father Hafez established a Soviet-style economy and quashed opposition. Initial hopes that Bashar Assad — who as-

sumed power in 2000 after his father's death — would prove more moderate were extinguished when Assad turned to longtime family allies to exert an increasingly authoritarian rule.

When pro-democratic protests sparked civil war in 2011, Assad responded with brutal force that ultimately saw more than 500,000 killed and countless atrocities marked by detention, torture and executions, prompting the United Nations to convene an independent international commission of inquiry on Syria.

As of 2024, 16.7 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian aid. More than half of Syria's 23 million pre-war population is displaced, with 5.2 million refugees and 6.8 million internally displaced persons, according to UNHCR, the U.N. refugee agency.

“Now, the path ahead is steep,” Cardinal Zenari told Vatican News, noting that “those who have taken power have promised to respect everyone and to build a new Syria.”

A number of local, regional and international parties have participated in the long-running Syrian conflict, including some allied with Islamic extremists. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (“Organization for the Liberation of the Levant”), which led the rebel forces, was initially linked to Islamic State and al-Qaida, but reestablished itself in 2016 under its current name while looking to move away from extremist roots. The U.S. still designates HTS as a foreign terrorist organization.

HTS leader Abu Mohammad al-Golani told The New York Times in an interview posted Dec. 6, “Our goal is to liberate Syria from this oppressive regime.”

Golani has sought to reassure Syria's small Christian population — concentrated in Aleppo, and currently estimated at about 30,000, down from some 200,000 at the start of the civil war — that his forces would “ensure your protection and safeguard your property.”

“Aleppo has always been a meeting point for civilizations and cultures, and it will remain so, with a long history of cultural and religious diversity,” he said in a statement posted to the Telegram messaging platform.

Agence France Presse reported Armenian Catholic Archbishop Boutros Marayati of Aleppo told worshippers during a recent Divine Liturgy there, “Do not fear, dear brothers. We have received assurances from all parties. Continue living normally, and everything will remain as before, even better.”

“The rebels met with the bishops in Aleppo immediately after their victory, assuring them that they would respect the various religious denominations and Christians,” Cardinal Zenari told Vatican News. “We hope they will keep this promise and move toward reconciliation.”

“As for the situation of the Christians all over Syria, we have been in contact with many of our partners, and all information received says that the rebels have sent many messages to all minorities to reassure to them that the goal is to turn over the Assad regime and not to (seek) revenge from anyone,” Michel Constantin, regional director for the Catholic Near East Welfare Association-Pontifical Mission in Lebanon and Syria, told OSV News in a Dec. 8 email.

CNEWA, established in 1926 by Pope Pius XI to support the Eastern churches, administers the Pontifical Mission, which was founded as the Pontifical Mission for Palestine by Pope Pius XII in 1949 to care for Palestinian refugees. The mandate of the

mission, which was subsequently placed under CNEWA's direction, has been extended by several pontiffs to care for all those affected by war and poverty in the Middle East.

Constantin said in his email that “after almost 10 days of occupation (in) Aleppo, all incoming information from our Christian partners say that so far no one has touched any Christian house or church or institution.”

He noted that “we will need more time to figure out how the transfer of power will be implemented and how the political process will evolve,” especially given the number of factions and their international backers — whose interests both overlap and conflict — that are involved.

“At the social level, it seems that the rebels are well organized, but of course many difficulties remain very challenging for the inhabitants and the population,” Constantin said.

He pointed out that prices have increased sharply, since “the currency has been changed” from the Syrian pound to the Turkish lira or the U.S. dollar, while “the majority of people” only have Syrian currency.

Cardinal Zenari told Vatican News that “beyond reconciliation, we hope Syria

can also find some prosperity because people have reached their limit,” with people “unable to survive in the country as it had become.”

He also expressed hope that the international community would assist the nation in its task of rebuilding as “a new Syria based on democratic principles.” He cited as an example “abolishing sanctions, as they are a burden that weighs heavily on the poor.”

As Syria stands at a crossroads, “we hope that a door of hope may open because what we witnessed was hope dying — or already dead,” Cardinal Zenari told Vatican News. “So we now hope that, with the help of the international community and the goodwill of all Syrians, a path toward reconciliation, reconstruction, and a minimum of prosperity for all people can begin.”

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

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Cathedral of St. Joseph, Wheeling

All are invited to attend this joyful occasion in the life of the
Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston.

Rorate Mass to be Celebrated Early Morning this Saturday, Dec. 14, in Morgantown

MORGANTOWN—An Advent tradition that is ancient in origin is surprisingly beginning to resurface in devotion in these modern years. Have you ever heard of a Rorate Mass (or “Rorate Caeli Mass”)? Just imagine—it’s the cold, frosty hours before dawn. Even though the sun won’t be up for some time, you roll out of bed and dress in church-going clothes before making the drive to the parish. The church looks totally dark, but when you walk in, many tiny, ardent flames are blazing on the altar and in the pews. The warm sparks throw hushed, rosy hues against the shadowed walls. Mass begins, still in

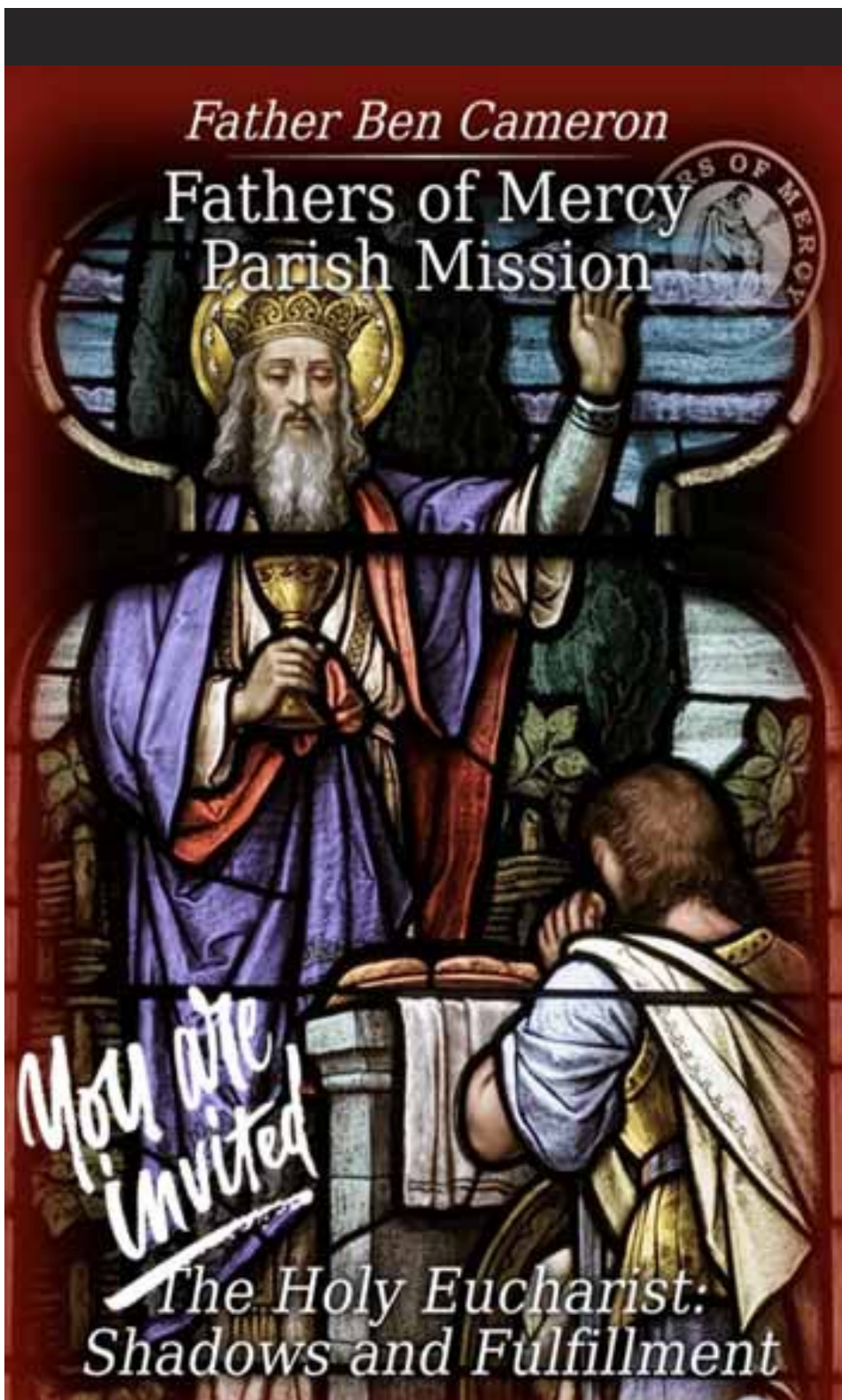
the semi-dark of candlelight. The choir begins chanting, “Drop down, you heavens, dew from above...” The readings speak of a Savior who will be born of a Virgin. Hot wax drips down the candles. As the Mass progresses, dawn creeps up to the stained-glass windows. The sunlight has begun to stream through the windows. The little points of flame are pale in the morning light.

This is a taste of the Rorate Mass—a special candlelit Mass celebrated in honor of the Blessed Mother on an Advent Saturday (this year on Dec. 14 at 7 a.m. at St. John University Parish

in Morgantown).

The Rorate tradition began around the 13th century during a surge of devotion to Mary in the life of the Church. Named for the first word of its entrance antiphon in Latin, the Mass is prayed as morning dawns, symbolizing the coming of the Christ Child’s light at Christmas. By the end of the Mass, the church is lit with the natural sunlight, symbolizing Christ being born from the Virgin’s womb.

This will be the fourth year St. John’s is having this Mass. The parish will have a light breakfast reception after Mass in the Newman Center.



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Dec 18 | Wednesday
 The Bread of the Presence: The Holy Eucharist as Real Presence

Dec 19 | Thursday
 The Eucharistic Sacrifice: Foretaste of Heaven
Closing Mission Mass at 7:00PM, followed by a reception and fellowship in baptistry/Cry Room.

*Confessions at 6:00 PM | Mission talk at 7:00PM

You are invited

The Holy Eucharist:
Shadows and Fulfillment

St. Joseph School Alumna's Eagle Project Brings Two-Wheeled Hope

MARTINSBURG — A Spring Mills High School senior's Eagle Scout project is bringing hope and a brighter future to families in distant lands, two wheels at a time.

Olivia Morrison, 17, organized a collection on Nov. 23 to benefit Bikes for the World so people in locales such as Costa Rica, Ghana, Madagascar and the Philippines can pedal to work, school and social-service agencies. That brisk and windy day, people came from as far away as Berkeley Springs and Sharpsburg, Md., to bring a total of 107 bikes and \$640 in donations to Spring Mills High. Also contributed were helmets and a bike rack for transporting two-wheelers on the back of a vehicle.

Some bikes that were not in good riding condition will be broken down into parts, said Morrison who is an alumna of St. Joseph School in Martinsburg. All of the donations were loaded Nov. 23 into a shipping container by Todd McDonald, operations manager for Bikes for the World. Bikes that are in decent shape will be reconditioned, then sent off to places like Costa Rica, where residents can use them to get to their jobs, schools and agencies that can further enhance their lives, saving precious time that typically is spent walking to such destinations. According to the website <https://www.bikesfortheworld.org/>, the bikes are also used for vocational training in the mechanics of bicycle repair and service, which helps create jobs.

Among the many who came out to support Morrison with bikes, smiles and helping hands were fellow St. Joseph School alumnae Rachael Dong, Lydia Hayes, Jackson Morrison, Kareena Sood and Julia Stedman.

Morrison has been a member of the Thunder



Courtesy photo
Among those who helped Spring Mills High School senior Olivia Morrison, fifth from left, collect used bikes and gear on Nov. 23 at the school to benefit Bikes for the World are, from left, McKayla Salazar, Jayden Travis, Julia Stedman, Amaya Cole, Cassidy Bayer, Sophia Prieto, Zach Uccellini (in beanie), Thomas Henson (in front of Zach) and Dominic Lopez (in orange).

Ducks patrol of Troop 37 in Hedgesville for about four years, but has spent a lifetime in Scouting. Her father was a Cub Scout leader, so Olivia always participated in events in which he was involved.

Her paternal grandparents heard about Bikes for the World marking its 20th anniversary this year and told Olivia about it, knowing she was searching for a worthy organization to support in her pursuit of the Eagle Award, the highest merit badge in Scouting.

She contacted Bikes for the World on Sept. 11 to see if she could help and the wheels immediately started turning.

The agency's mission appealed to Morrison, who learned about poverty in the Mountain State and how few transportation options there are for those struggling financially when she attended

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Courtesy photo
In pursuit of the Eagle Scout Award, Spring Mills High School senior Olivia Morrison collected used bikes and gear on Nov. 23 at the school to benefit Bikes for the World.



Courtesy photo
St. Joseph School alumna and current Spring Mills High School senior Kareena Sood, left, and Jake Loudon showed up Nov. 23 to help Olivia Morrison collect used bikes and gear on Nov. 23 at the school to benefit Bikes for the World.

Project...

Cont'd from Page 7

Governor's Honors Academy, a summer residential program meant to stimulate excellence in education for rising high school seniors in West Virginia.

"Keeping the bikes out of landfills or being thrown out in the woods" also fed her passion for sustainability, which she would like to study in college, along with environmental science and possibly engineering.

The Kearneysville resident said her immediate family members are native West Virginians with a love for nature and protecting the environment.

"Apparently, I was obsessed with dirt as a kid," said Morrison, who is a teaching assistant for a West Virginia University-proctored biology class at Spring Mills High. She considers rocks to be "physical pieces of earth history" and is fascinated by them.

She hopes to continue studying all things related to the environment in college. She applied to attend Rochester (N.Y.) Institute of Technology, Bryn Mawr (Pa.) College, William & Mary in Williamsburg, Va., and College of Charleston in South Carolina. She also was accepted in the Honors College at West Virginia University.

Morrison still has to complete a few more steps to see if she qualifies for the Eagle award, but is proud of her project.



Courtesy photo

St. Joseph School alumna Lydia Hayes, now a senior at Jefferson High School, showed up Nov. 23 to help fellow SJS alum Olivia Morrison collect used bikes and gear on Nov. 23 at the school to benefit Bikes for the World.

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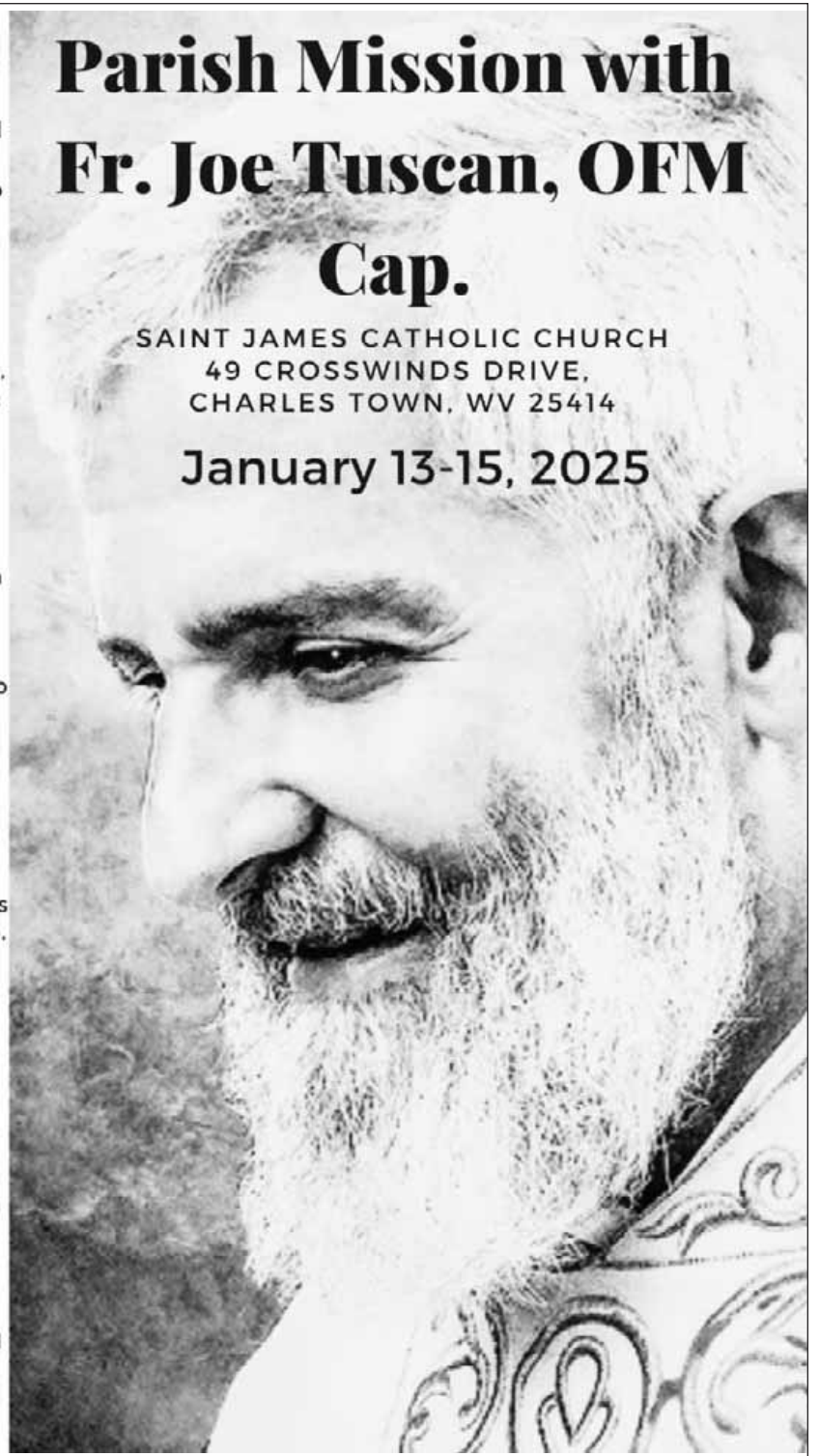
Contact Colleen Rowan at crowan@dwc.org

Fr. Joseph was born in Columbus, OH, in 1967 and was raised in Canton, OH. He earned his Bachelor's degree in 1989 from Borromeo College Seminary. In 1990, he professed his first vows as a Capuchin Franciscan friar. Making his Perpetual vows in 1993, he went on to earn his Master's degree in theology in 1995 and was ordained to the priesthood in 1997. His first assignment after ordination was in Papua New Guinea in the South Pacific where he served for four years. Returning to the US in 2001, he has ministered in various capacities as a parochial vicar and pastor, as well as a military and hospital chaplain; he also served in our Province's Custody of Puerto Rico. Our brother currently serves as the national director of the Archconfraternity of Christian Mothers and in full-time preaching ministry for the Capuchin Province of St. Augustine, offering retreats and reflection days for parishes, Religious and Priests. Fr. Joseph can be viewed on several YouTube channels and has appeared on Catholic Radio and TV outlet

Parish Mission with Fr. Joe Tuscan, OFM Cap.

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Prayer Does Work Miracles

Retreat to Bring Hope through Rwandan Holocaust Survivor's Story

By **Joyce Bibey**

Prayer works miracles! The life of Immaculée Ilbagiza is a testimony to that mantra.

Today, we highlight her for two reasons: the first, as we approach Pope Francis and the Church's Year of Hope for 2025, Ilbagiza is a beautiful example of how faith and hope can pull you through – excuse the blunt, honest description here — a living hell; and the second reason, faithful in the diocese and surrounding areas have an opportunity to meet her and be inspired by her story in July at a retreat at St. James the Greater Parish in Charles Town (this event coupled with her book – “Left to Tell, Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust” could be a great Christmas gift to someone or yourself).

Immaculée Ilbagiza was born and raised Catholic along with her three brothers in a rural village in Rwanda, Africa. She was a bright child and was studying to be an engineer in college.

In April of 1994, home for Easter break, what would be the worst civil war in her country began to rage. Her survival is one thing, but what bloomed into a devotion to the Blessed Mother and the Rosary is another awe-inspiring story.

To protect his precious daughter from unthinkable assaults and murder, Immaculée's father gave her his Rosary and had her run to the local pastor's home for protection. It was there she and seven other women were hidden by the pastor in a 3-foot by 4-foot bathroom for 91 days. Not knowing their fate sorrow set in, then anger, and then a turning point — prayer. It was her Rosary and prayer that lifted her above the hatred and saved her and her companions. When it was safe to come out of hiding, and weighing less than 70 pounds she learned her entire family except for one brother who did not make it home from his university outside the country, were dead. They were among the more than 1 million men, women, and children brutally murdered.



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Lourdes Confirms 71st Miracle — the First for an English Speaker; Miracle Occurred in 1926

By **Caroline de Sury, OSV News**

PARIS (OSV News) — The list of miracles that have taken place at the French Marian shrine in Lourdes now includes, for the first time, an English-speaking soldier-patient.

Archbishop Malcolm McMahon of Liverpool, a seaside British city, officially announced on Dec. 8 that the 71st miracle had been granted to a British soldier, wounded during World War I.

John Traynor, a soldier in the Royal Navy, was hit by machine-gun fire in 1915 in present-day Turkey. He was cured at Lourdes during a pilgrimage for his diocese in 1923.

"This is a very special case, since we simply searched the archives for the result of investigative work that had been carried out almost 100 years ago," Fra' Alessandro de Franciscis, the doctor in charge of the Lourdes Sanctuary's Office of Medical Observations since 2009, told OSV News. "In reality, this healing had already been officially recognized at Lourdes in 1926," the medical professional, who is also grand hospitaller of the Sovereign Order of Malta, said.

According to details provided by the sanctuary, Traynor had undergone numerous surgical operations after his injuries, but to no avail. He had lost the use of his right arm and suffered from severe epileptic seizures. Attempts at medical treatment had resulted in partial paralysis of his legs.

"He was living on a war pension," de Franciscis said, "but in July 1923, he went to Lourdes on the occasion of the first pilgrimage of the Archdiocese of Liverpool, and he was cured on the third day, immediately, instantly, after being immersed in the sanctuary's pools."

St. Bernadette Soubirous witnessed 18 Marian apparitions beginning on Feb. 11, 1858, and people of her time witnessed the first physical and spiritual healing

miracles after visiting the shrine or drinking or washing in the spring Our Lady pointed Bernadette to in an apparition. To date, dozens of miracles have been confirmed by the special medical commission permanently working at the shrine, which de Franciscis leads.

"When he returned home to the U.K., he was examined by the doctors," the doctor said. "They were amazed."

"I would point out that his recovery was complete," de Franciscis added. "Previously, he was almost paralyzed in his legs, and out of condition to have children. But after his recovery, he and his wife had several children," he stressed.

"Three doctors who were with him on the pilgrimage encouraged him to return to Lourdes to testify to his healing," the head of Lourdes' medical office recounted. "That is what he did in July 1926. The collegial investigation took place in Lourdes, according to the usual procedures. The conclusion was that this cure was truly inexplicable."

Everything was properly noted by the predecessors of doctors now working in Lourdes.

"The sanctuary's newspaper published in full, at the time, the minutes of the Office of Medical Observations doctors' meeting, with the testimonies from the English doctors who had examined John Traynor before and after this cure."

Because of post-war turbulence in Europe, communications between Lourdes and Liverpool regarding conclusions of the inquiry were never forwarded to the Archbishop of Liverpool.

"But this was the post-war era, and there were still organizational and communication dysfunctions at the shrine. ... In general, the healings recognized by the sanctuary in the 1920s and 1930s were most often not made public until the 1950s," the lead Lourdes doctor said.



OSV News photo/courtesy Lourdes Sanctuary
Pilgrims touch the rock at the Grotto of the Apparitions in the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes, France, on Aug. 14.

"After his recovery, John Traynor became a member of the Hospitalité of Lourdes, where he went every year," de Franciscis said, referring to the religious confraternity under the spiritual authority of the bishop of Tarbes and Lourdes, which is active in Lourdes during the main pilgrimage season, providing people to welcome pilgrims at the sanctuary's baths.

"He was strong and healthy, and to English and Irish Catholics, it was obvious that there had been a miracle. But the official documents attesting to his recovery in Lourdes, before and after the miracle, were forgotten," the doctor told OSV News.

"On the occasion of the centenary of this first pilgrimage to Lourdes by the Archdiocese of Liverpool, we turned our attention back to his case," de Franciscis explained. "We undertook a search of the archives, and found the documents. They prove beyond doubt that the Lourdes Bureau had made a definitive judgment on the unexplained nature of this cure. They are clear and unambiguous."

In recent months, Bishop Jean-Marc Micas of Tarbes and Lourdes, was able to forward a complete dossier to the Archdiocese of Liverpool, which led its archbishop to recognize the healing as a miracle, the doctor confirmed.

Traynor, who died in 1943, is therefore the 71st recognized miraculous cure from Lourdes.

The 70th person miraculously cured is still alive, de Franciscis said. She is a French woman religious, Sister Bernadette Moriau, now over 85. Her miraculous cure was recognized in 2018, after 10 years of investigation.

"And John Traynor is the first case of healing of an English-speaking patient," de Franciscis said. "Most of the miracles are French. There are Italians too, a Belgian and a German. But there were not any English speakers yet."

"I am personally sensitive to this," the doctor concluded with a smile. "I myself am Italian, born in Naples, but of an American mother, from Connecticut!"

(Caroline de Sury writes for OSV News from Paris.)

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Con la caída de Assad, el nuncio papal de Siria reza por el futuro de la nación

Por Gina Christian, OSV News

(OSV News) -- El nuncio apostólico en Siria dice que espera que la nación devastada por la guerra "avance hacia la reconciliación" y al menos "algo de prosperidad" bajo un gobierno democrático, tras la destitución del ex presidente sirio Bashar Assad en una ofensiva relámpago de los grupos rebeldes.

El cardenal Mario Zenari habló con Vatican News horas después de que los rebeldes entraran en la capital, Damasco, de la que se informó que Assad había huido en algún momento del 8 de diciembre, tras haber estado ausente de la escena pública durante la mayor parte de la campaña de dos semanas de los rebeldes. Assad y su familia se encuentran ahora en Moscú, donde se les ha concedido asilo, según los medios de comunicación estatales rusos, uno de los principales apoyos del régimen de Assad.

El cardenal Zenari le dijo a Vatican News que no había podido dormir en medio de los "constantemente tiroteos" en Damasco, pero señaló que los "disparos en las calles" eran una "celebración" en medio de una asombrosa transición de poder que se produjo sin una sangrienta contienda por la capital.

El primer ministro sirio, Mohammad Ghazi al Jalali, afirmó en un mensaje de vídeo grabado y publicado el 8 de diciembre que estaba "dispuesto a cooperar con cualquier dirigente elegido por el pueblo y a prestar todo el apoyo posible para garantizar una transición fluida y sistemática de las tareas de gobierno y la preservación de las instalaciones estatales".

La ofensiva rebelde puso fin a cinco décadas de gobierno de la familia Assad, marcado por la represión violenta y la brutal represión de la disidencia. Durante sus tres décadas en el poder, el padre de Assad, Hafez, estableció una economía de estilo soviético y aplastó a la oposición. Las esperanzas iniciales de que Bashar Assad -- quien asumió el poder en 2000 tras la muerte de su padre -- resultara más moderado se extinguieron

cuando Assad recurrió a antiguos aliados de la familia para ejercer un gobierno cada vez más autoritario.

Cuando las protestas prodemocráticas desencadenaron la guerra civil en 2011, Assad respondió con una fuerza brutal que acabó con más de 500.000 muertos e innumerables atrocidades marcadas por detenciones, torturas y ejecuciones, lo que llevó a las Naciones Unidas a convocar una comisión internacional independiente de investigación sobre Siria.

En 2024, 16,7 millones de sirios necesitarán ayuda humanitaria. Más de la mitad de los 23 millones de habitantes de Siria antes de la guerra están desplazados, con 5,2 millones de refugiados y 6,8 millones de desplazados internos, según ACNUR, la agencia de la ONU para los refugiados.

"Ahora, el camino por delante es escarpado", el cardenal Zenari dijo a Vatican News, señalando que "los que han tomado el poder han prometido respetar a todos y construir una nueva Siria.

En el prolongado conflicto sirio han participado diversas partes locales, regionales e internacionales, algunas de ellas aliadas de extremistas islámicos. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham ("Organización para la Liberación del Levante"), que lideraba las fuerzas rebeldes, estuvo vinculada inicialmente al Estado Islámico y a Al Qaeda, pero se restableció en 2016 con su nombre actual mientras buscaba alejarse de las raíces extremistas. Estados Unidos sigue designando a HTS como organización terrorista extranjera.

El líder de HTS, Abu Mohammad al-Golani, dijo a The New York Times en una entrevista publicada el 6 de diciembre: "Nuestro objetivo es liberar a Siria de este régimen opresivo".

Golani ha tratado de tranquilizar a la pequeña población cristiana de Siria -- concentrada en Alepo, y estimada actualmente en unos 30.000, frente a unos 200.000 al comienzo de la guerra civil -- asegurando que sus fuerzas "garantizarían su protección y salvaguardarían

sus propiedades".

"Alepo siempre ha sido un punto de encuentro de civilizaciones y culturas, y lo seguirá siendo, con una larga historia de diversidad cultural y religiosa", afirmó en un comunicado publicado en la plataforma de mensajes Telegram.

La Agencia France Presse informó de que el arzobispo armenio católico de Alepo, Boutros Marayati, dijo a los fieles durante una reciente liturgia divina: "No teman, queridos hermanos. Hemos recibido garantías de todas las partes. Sigán viviendo con normalidad y todo seguirá como antes, incluso mejor".

"Los rebeldes se reunieron con los obispos en Alepo inmediatamente después de su victoria, asegurándoles que respetarían las diversas confesiones religiosas y a los cristianos", dijo el cardenal Zenari a Vatican News. "Esperamos que mantengan esta promesa y avancen hacia la reconciliación".

"En cuanto a la situación de los cristianos en toda Siria, hemos estado en contacto con muchos de nuestros socios, y toda la información recibida dice que los rebeldes han enviado muchos mensajes a todas las minorías para asegurarles que el objetivo es derrocar al régimen de Assad y no (buscar) la venganza de nadie", dijo Michel Constantin, director regional de Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA) en Líbano y Siria, a OSV News en un correo electrónico el 8 de diciembre.

CNEWA, establecido en 1926 por el Papa Pío XI para apoyar a las iglesias orientales, administra la Misión Pontificia, que fue fundada como Misión Pontificia para Palestina por el Papa Pío XII en 1949 para atender a los refugiados palestinos. El mandato de la misión, que posteriormente pasó a estar bajo la dirección del CNEWA, ha sido ampliado por varios pontífices para atender a todos los afectados por la guerra y la pobreza en Oriente Medio.

Constantin dijo en su correo electrónico que "después de casi 10 días de ocupación (en) Alepo, todas las informaciones recibidas de nuestros socios

cristianos dicen que hasta ahora nadie ha tocado ninguna casa, iglesia o institución cristiana".

Señaló que "necesitaremos más tiempo para averiguar cómo se llevará a cabo el traspaso de poder y cómo evolucionará el proceso político", sobre todo teniendo en cuenta el número de facciones presentes y los grupos internacionales que les brindan apoyo -- cuyos intereses se interrelacionan y entran en conflicto -- que están implicados.

"En el plano social, parece que los rebeldes están bien organizados, pero por supuesto siguen existiendo muchas dificultades para los habitantes y la población", afirmó Constantin.

Señaló que los precios han aumentado mucho, ya que "se ha cambiado la moneda" de la libra siria a la lira turca o al dólar estadounidense, mientras que "la mayoría de la gente" sólo tiene moneda siria.

El cardenal Zenari declaró a Vatican News que "más allá de la reconciliación, esperamos que Siria pueda encontrar también algo de prosperidad porque la gente ha llegado a su límite", con personas "incapaces de sobrevivir en el país tal y como se había convertido".

También expresó su esperanza de que la comunidad internacional ayude a la nación en su tarea de reconstrucción como "una nueva Siria basada en principios democráticos". Puso como ejemplo "la abolición de las sanciones, ya que son una carga que pesa mucho sobre los pobres".

Mientras Siria se encuentra en una encrucijada, "esperamos que pueda abrirse una puerta a la esperanza, porque lo que hemos presenciado era la esperanza moribunda, o ya muerta", dijo el cardenal Zenari a Vatican News. "Por eso, ahora esperamos que, con la ayuda de la comunidad internacional y la buena voluntad de todos los sirios, pueda iniciarse un camino hacia la reconciliación, la reconstrucción y un mínimo de prosperidad para todo el pueblo".

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304.230.1504. También puede llamar a la línea directa de abuso sexual de la Diócesis al 833.230.5656. Los formularios de queja están disponibles en línea en www.dwc.org, haga clic en "Diócesis" en la barra de menú, luego en "Oficinas", luego en "Ambiente seguro", luego "Descargar archivos y formularios". El formulario se titula "Formulario de queja para denuncias de abuso sexual de menores". El formulario se puede devolver por correo de EE. UU. A: Office of Safe Environment, Diócesis de Wheeling-Charleston, PO Box 230, Wheeling WV 26003.

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Además de los métodos enumerados anteriormente para denunciar el abuso sexual, la Diócesis también se ha asociado con Navex Global para ofrecer la plataforma EthicsPoint para informar otras inquietudes adicionales, como sospecha de mala conducta financiera, profesional y personal de un sacerdote, diácono, religioso, o empleado laico de la Diócesis o cualquier parroquia o escuela católica en West Virginia. Se puede acceder a la plataforma EthicsPoint a través de www.dwc.org, en "Rendición de cuentas", luego "Informar mala conducta" o llamando al 844.723.8381. EthicsPoint es un sistema de informes de terceros que informa a las autoridades civiles cuando corresponda y a las autoridades diocesanas, y la identidad de la persona que informa esta 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 Niños: 304-293-6400.

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For more information, click [here](#). Contact the Director, Gerri Wright at (304) 342-0507.

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Works evenings, weekends and holidays/holydays as needed. Works in kitchen & housekeeping when needed.

For more information, click [here](#).

Contact the Director, Gerri Wright at (304) 342-0507 or gwright@dwc.org to schedule an interview or for more information.

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