

THE CATHOLIC

Spirit

Message of Guadalupe Based in Simplicity, Not Ideology, Pope Says

By **Justin McLellan**

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The iconic image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which has become a cultural and spiritual symbol for Latin America, cannot be used to promote any kind of ideology, but must maintain its message of simple love, Pope Francis said.

The Marian image that appeared

on the cloak of St. Juan Diego “frees us from so many social and political ideologies that so often use this ‘Guadalupan’ reality to base themselves in, to justify themselves and to earn money,” he said Dec. 12 during Mass on the feast of our Lady of Guadalupe.

“The message of Guadalupe does not tolerate any ideology of

any kind,” he said at the Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica, without specifying any ideology in particular.

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.

The pope said the Marian image “remains impressed on the simplic-

ity of who we are and what we have, which is of little value, but which will become something great in God’s eyes.”

Spanish-speakers filled St. Peter’s Basilica for the papal Mass. Many wore shawls or scarves with an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe and others brought

See “Guadalupe” on Page 4

Bishop Celebrates Our Lady of Guadalupe Feast with Parishioners of St. Francis de Sales in Beckley



Courtesy Photo

Bishop Mark Brennan is pictured with parishioners at St. Francis de Sales Parish in Beckley following the 11 p.m., Dec. 11 Vigil Mass for the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Standing next to the bishop, are Father Thomas Dharelli, HGN, associate pastor at St. Francis de Sales (left), and Father Leonard Smith, pastor, (second left).

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Two Ohio Dioceses Considering Merger

By **Gina Christian**

(OSV News) — Two Ohio dioceses are considering a potential merger, according to a joint letter issued Dec. 11 by Bishop Earl K. Fernandes of the Diocese of Columbus, Ohio, and Bishop Paul J. Bradley, apostolic administrator of the Diocese of Steubenville, Ohio, who said they “have begun very preliminary discussions regarding the potential merger of the dioceses.”

The bishops said “the Apostolic Nunciature has asked the dioceses to work together to consider how different dimensions of the dioceses, including the temporal aspects of life, might be affected by such a proposal.”

The move comes a year after a similar attempt was put on hold by former Steubenville Bishop Jeffrey M. Monforton.

In October 2022, Bishop Monforton — whom Pope Francis appointed auxiliary bishop of Detroit in September — announced a potential merger of the dioceses due to a downturn in demographics and vocations.

The prospect sparked “disappointment and even fear,” Bishop Monforton later admitted in a Nov. 7, 2022, letter to the diocese announcing the merger plans had been temporarily

shelved.

Now, “while no decision has been made, due diligence is needed so an educated and responsible decision can be discerned in a timely manner,” wrote Bishop Fernandes and Bishop Bradley.

“Ultimately the decision is up to the Holy Father,” they wrote. “The work has begun, and as the work continues, updates will be provided.”

They asked clergy and laity “to pray that the unified work may be fruitful.”

The Vatican erected the Columbus diocese in 1868. It covers 23 counties in central and south central Ohio. Created in 1944, the Steubenville diocese covers 13 counties in southeastern Ohio. According to 2021 statistics, the Columbus diocese has a Catholic population of nearly 290,000 out of a total population of just over 2.8 million. Statistics on the Steubenville Diocese from 2020, the latest available, show that there are just over 30,000 Catholics out of a total population of about 496,000.

Besides Columbus and Steubenville, Ohio has three other Catholic dioceses, Cleveland, Toledo and Youngstown, and one archdiocese, Cincinnati.

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

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 Very Rev. Dennis Schuelkens, Jr., V.E., ext. 270; or Sr. Martha Gomez, ext. 264. You may also call the Diocese’s Office of Safe Environment at 304.230.1504. You may also call 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:** please call Erin McFarland, M.Ed., LPC, at 304.559.6742. In addition to the methods listed above for reporting sexual abuse, the Diocese also has partnered with Navex Global to offer the EthicsPoint platform to report other, additional 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 West Virginia. The EthicsPoint platform 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.

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. In accordance with these requirements, 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; and sexual abuse awareness training for adults. Sexual abuse awareness training may be completed online or via live workshop. For more information, go to www.dwc.org, click “Diocese”, then “Offices,” then “Office of Safe Environment.”

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Special Collection for the Holy Land Region to be Held Jan. 13-14 in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston

By Colleen Rowan

WEST VIRGINIA—Bishop Mark Brennan has approved a special collection for the Holy Land region to be held in parishes and missions of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston at Masses the weekend of Jan. 13-14.

The bishop made the announcement Dec. 14 to all priests, parishes, and missions of the diocese.

“We are all aware of the current Hamas-Israeli war and the escalation in violence in the Holy Land,” the bishop said in the announcement. “The money collected will be sent to The Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA), a papal agency for humanitarian and pastoral support. They will provide the essentials of water, food, and emergency kits on the ground in the Holy Land. CNEWA has offices in the region and know where and what kind of help is needed the most.”

Checks for the collection are to be made payable to one’s respective parish/mission and on the memo

line indicate CNEWA Holy Land Collection. The parish/mission will then send one check for all contributions for this collection to the DWC Finance Department.

The bishop is asking parishes to spread the word about the importance of this collection.

“Please continue to pray for peace and for all those who have suffered losses during this war,” the bishop said.

CNEWA was founded by Pope Pius XI in 1926 as an instrument of love and a sign of hope for those in need scattered throughout the historic but unstable lands of the ancient Eastern churches — the Middle East, Northeast Africa, India and Eastern Europe, the organization’s website states.

For nearly 100 years, the site states, CNEWA has walked side by side with those in need.

“We have prayed with them when they were attacked, comforted them when they grieved, fed them when they hungered, bandaged them when they bled, shel-

tered them when they had no place to call home,” the site states. “We have been there, always, through the arms of the living body of Christ, the church, as they live for others, counseling the despondent, caring for the sick, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, teaching the eager and forming the next generation of leaders.”

CNEWA, the site notes, is a network of generous and compassionate people scattered throughout the world, committed to living Jesus’ great command to “love one another” by reaching out to their neighbors in need, regardless of where their neighbor may be.

This network links generous donors with the laity, priests, sisters and bishops of the local churches — CNEWA’s “boots on the ground” — who receive help and touch

countless lives in incalculable ways in Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, India, Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine.

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Accepting New Patients

Why is Our Lady of Guadalupe Patroness of the Unborn?

By Katie Yoder, Catholic News Agency

On Dec. 12 we celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, who is the patroness of the unborn.

When Our Lady appeared to St. Juan Diego nearly 500 years ago, she came first and foremost as a mother — the mother of God and our mother.

“Listen, and let it penetrate your heart, my dear little son; do not be troubled or weighted down with grief. Do not fear any illness or vexation, anxiety, or pain,” Our Lady of Guadalupe is quoted as saying to Juan Diego. “Am I not here who am your mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not your fountain of life? Are you not in the folds of my mantle? In the crossing of my arms? Is there anything else you need?”

She spoke as his mother and as the mother of an unborn baby Jesus when she appeared on the Hill of Tepeyac in Mexico City in 1531. Her miraculous image, imprinted on the saint’s tilma, or cloak, shows her wearing a black sash, an indication of pregnancy in the native culture.

Guadalupe...

Cont’d from Page 1

framed portraits of the image to be blessed.

U.S.-born Cardinal Robert Prevost, prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops and president of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, was the main celebrant at the altar.

In his homily, the pope highlighted part of the story of St. Juan Diego, who Mary asked to pick roses during winter to show to the local bishop as a sign of her appearance.

Flowers “signify that the virtues which the Lord instills in the heart are not our own work,” he said. “The act of collecting them reveals to us that God wants us to accept that gift, that we ‘perfume’ our weak reality with good works, driving out hatred and fears.”

Although he spoke without any sign of difficulty, Pope Francis skipped much of his prepared text. He recently canceled a trip to the United Arab Emirates due to a bronchial infection, and aides read his speeches on his behalf several times in the past week.

The pope recalled the words which Mary spoke to St. Juan Diego during one of her apparitions to him: “Am I not here, I, who am your mother?”

He said that Mary’s presence is “permanently impressed” in the lives of Christians just as on the cloak St. Juan Diego, “perfumed by virtues gathered in a world that seems incapable of producing them.”

“Virtues,” he said, “that fill our poverty in the simplicity of small acts of love, that illuminate our cloak, without us knowing it, with the image of a church that carries Christ in its womb.”

To end Mass, the choirs of the Pontifical Mexican College and the Pontifical Latin American College, joined by the thousands in the basilica, sang “La Guadalupana,” a celebratory song that tells of the special bond between Our Lady of Guadalupe and the people of Mexico.

Our Lady of Guadalupe not only looked like a native woman, but she also spoke in the same language as one. She came at a time of conflict between the Spanish and the Indigenous peoples to ask Juan Diego to persuade the bishop to build a church. As a sign to the bishop, she instructed the saint to gather Castilian roses in full bloom despite the winter. When he presented the flowers to the bishop, he discovered her image left on his tilma.

Today, the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City houses that image, which is visited by millions of pilgrims each year. She is not only considered the patroness of the Americas but also of the unborn. Here’s why.

In 1999, Pope John Paul II established Dec. 12 as the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

“This is our cry: life with dignity for all! For all who have been conceived in their mother’s womb, for street children, for Guadalupe!” he declared at the basilica.

Nearly 20 years later, in 2018, Pope Francis entrusted to Our Lady of Guadalupe “in particular, those who are awaiting the birth of their children.”

“St. John Paul II commended to her maternal protection the life and innocence of children, especially those who run the risk of not being born,” he told Polish pilgrims during his general audience. “By her intercession, in this time of Advent, let us implore the gift of children for families without children, respect for the conceived life and the openness of hearts to Gospel values.”

The website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

features a prayer asking for the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe, as the patroness of unborn children, for “every child at risk of abortion.” The prayer is shown below.

“Help expectant parents to welcome from God the priceless gift of their child’s life,” the prayer reads. “Console parents who have lost that gift through abortion, and lead them to forgiveness and healing through the divine mercy of your Son.”



A Prayer to Our Lady of Guadalupe, Patroness of Unborn Children

Virgin of Guadalupe, Patroness of unborn children, we implore your intercession for every child at risk of abortion.

Help expectant parents to welcome from God the priceless gift of their child’s life.

Console parents who have lost that gift through abortion, and lead them to forgiveness and healing through the Divine Mercy of your Son.

Teach us to cherish and to care for family and friends until God calls them home. Help us never to see others as burdens.

Guide our public officials to defend each and every human life through just laws. Inspire us all to bring our faith into public life, to speak for those who have no voice.

We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, who is Love and Mercy itself. Amen.

Courtesy of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

Caring for Our Neighbors

By Mark Phillips, Catholic Charities West Virginia President and Chief Executive Officer

"I think there must be something wrong with me, Linus. Christmas is coming, but I'm not happy. I don't feel the way I'm supposed to feel." – from A Charlie Brown Christmas

These words hung in my head when I went out to buy Halloween (yes, Halloween, stay with me) decorations this fall. I had what I thought was the reasonable assumption that Halloween decorations would be available the second week of October – but, upon walking into the local Lowe's, I found myself in the 1st week of a new, 12-week-long Advent season!

Just like Charlie Brown, it's pretty easy to get jaded at the increasing commercialization of Christmas. As the Peanuts gang gathers to decorate his scrawny little tree, he exclaims, "Isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?" It's then that his friend Linus takes center stage, reciting the biblical story of the birth of Jesus, reminding everyone of the true meaning of Christmas. I can still hear Linus' voice: "You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." As it turns out, Charlie Brown just needed a good friend to reorient him to the mystery and magic of the season.

This iconic scene serves as a reminder that, amidst the hustle and bustle of festive preparations, the spirit of Christmas lies in caring for our neighbors and embodying the values of compassion and kindness. The message resonates beyond the animated world of Charlie Brown, urging us to reflect on the importance of reaching out to those around us during the holiday season.

Caring for our neighbors at Christmas is not just a seasonal obligation but an opportunity to create a community infused with love and generosity. The essence of this caring spirit can be expressed through both grand gestures and simple acts of kindness. The season



Courtesy Photo

Catholic Charities West Virginia President and Chief Executive Officer Mark Phillips serves meals at the Catholic Charities Neighborhood Center in Wheeling.

provides a perfect backdrop for volunteering at local shelters, organizing food drives, or participating in community outreach programs. By actively contributing to the well-being of those less fortunate, we extend the spirit of Christmas beyond our immediate circles, fostering a sense of unity and compassion within the broader community. On a more personal level, the holiday season offers an opportunity to strengthen the bonds within our neighborhoods. Organizing family parties, potluck dinners, or festive gatherings not only enhances the sense of community but also allows neighbors to connect on a deeper level. Sharing stories, laughter, and good food can be a powerful way to break down barriers and build lasting relationships.

I'm very proud that the work we do at Catholic Charities West Virginia is rooted in this theology of ac-

companiment. While we can offer food, help with utility bills, or connections to other resources, it's crucial to remember that caring for our neighbors extends

beyond the material realm. Taking the time to listen, offering emotional support, or simply being present for someone going through a tough time can make a

world of difference. In the true spirit of Christmas, these intangible gifts of empathy and understanding embody the essence of caring for one another.

Help Those In Need.

Give to the second collection at Christmas Mass to support Catholic Charities.



Come to me, all who are weary and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
-Matthew 11:28



Donate online at
www.CatholicCharitiesWV.org

President Emeritus Honored by Holy See at CDU's 40th Anniversary Gala

ARLINGTON, Va.—At the Catholic Distance University (CDU) 40th anniversary gala on Nov. 17, President Emeritus Dr. Marianne Evans Mount was named a Dame of The Order of St. Gregory the Great, the highest honor a layperson can receive from the Catholic Church.

Serving as Pope Francis' personal representative, Cardinal Christophe Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, presented the award to Mount at the Army Navy Country Club in Arlington, Va. University Chancellor Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA, and president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, initiated the award nomination with the Holy See.

Fewer than 10 women have received this honor since the Order of St. Gregory the Great began admitting Dames in addition to Knights in 1994. Other notable recipients of the award include Eunice Kennedy Shriver, founder of the Special Olympics; Mexican actor Ricardo Montalban; Supreme Knight Carl A. Anderson; and American publisher, philanthropist, and diplomat Walter Hubert Annenberg.

Mount currently serves as a consultor to the Holy See's Dicastery for Culture and Education in recognition of her many contributions to the innovative realm of Catholic distance education. "Dr. Marianne Mount is a jewel in the crown for Catholic education," said trustee Hon. Susan R. Malone. "She'll be remembered for being the first. She had a vision for the future, for Catholic education." Malone is also a first: in 1973, she was one of the first two female FBI agents.

Cardinal Pierre presented Mount with an eight pointed cross, suspended from a red and gold ribbon and a crown of laurel. The center of the cross bears an image of St. Gregory on the obverse, and on the reverse the motto *Pro Deo et Principe*, "For God and Ruler." She also received a diploma written in Latin bearing the signature and seal of the Cardinal Secretary of State.

Pope Gregory XVI established the Order of St. Gregory the Great in September 1831; it is one of five orders of knighthood of the Holy See. Admittance is bestowed upon Roman Catholic men and women—and rarely, non-Catholics—in recognition of their personal service to



Photo Courtesy of CDU

CDU President Emeritus Dr. Marianne Evans Mount is pictured with Cardinal Christophe Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States (right), and Chancellor Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA, and president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

the Holy See and to the Roman Catholic Church, through their unusual labors, their support of the Holy See, and their excellent examples set forth in their communities and their countries.

Mount's "unusual labor" was the growth of CDU from a catechetical institute offering correspondence courses to an exclusively online, highly rated accredited university that enrolls students worldwide. "This is an example of the mustard seed parable lived out magnificently," said trustee Kelly McGinn.

During Mount's 40-year career at CDU, she held various leadership roles, finally serving as president from 2008 to June 30, 2023. Speaking of the institution's founding, Mount said, "We had a lot of opposition. No one really thought you could form people by correspondence. It had to be face-to-face, and we proved them wrong."

Since offering its first accredited degree program in 1996, a Master of Arts in Religious Studies, the university has educated thousands of students, and many continue to serve the Church. Most alumni are employed in a wide variety of fields, including education, business, healthcare, medicine, and law, and some have become deacons, priests, and religious.

Speaking of CDU in a video presented at the gala, Father Robert J. Spitzer, founder and president of the Spitzer Center, said, "You've not

only educated generations of people in faith and reason, you've formed a cadre of evangelists through that education that's going to extend your mission far beyond what you ever dreamt of."

Mount, who joined CDU in 1983, is credited with being the driving force behind the university's growth and success.

"Marianne took that football and ran to a goalpost that was far beyond what anyone expected," said longtime CDU supporter Treena Rinaldi, who is the niece of Bishop Thomas J. Welsh, the first Bishop of Arlington who established CDU and recruited Mount to be one of two initial staff members.

When Mount retired in 2023, the university had launched a new program in Catholic Social Teaching, both in Spanish and English, with support from a nearly \$1 million grant from the Lilly Endowment. Under her leadership, the university, which had been accredited by the Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC) since 1986, also secured accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission in 2022, and The Association of Theological Schools in 2020.

With the university's third president, Dr. Maria Sophia Aguirre, at the helm, CDU is positioned to become the "university of the future." Aguirre seeks to greatly expand the university's degree offerings into new disciplines, the university's global expansion.

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Knights Carroll Council #504 Delivers Coats for Kids to Youth Services System in Wheeling



WHEELING—Knights of Columbus Carroll Council #504 delivered provisions collected through Coats for Kids to Youth Services System in Wheeling. The final tally: 143 coats, 55 hats, 53 pairs of gloves, 15 socks and seven scarves. Council members are pictured above displaying the collected items. The council thanks Rich Brosh and John Dudzik for helping with the weekly collection and Marybeth Emmerth for helping get the coats ready for delivery to YSS.

“Brother Phil Emmerth did a marvelous job coordinating the entire effort,” said Council #504 Grand Knight Rex Lasure. “He and I did the delivery today and spent time with the representative who ... explained the work they do with providing clothing, household items (kitchenware, furniture and bedding) as well as books and games for kids. This is all from donations and are provided to those who need such items free of any charges.”

Lasure encouraged those who have clothing, furniture, books, games or kitchenware to donate, to consider Youth Services System at 87 15th Street Wheeling “as a very worthy place to do that.”

Consider asking a friend to join the Knights of Columbus. Direct him to the wvkoqc.org website which has the form prominently displayed to assist in joining online.

Courtesy Photo



Fairmont Knights Raise Funds for Disability Action Center

Courtesy Photo

Through the annual Tootsie Roll drive, the Knights of Columbus Marian Council # 942 in Fairmont raised more than \$1,144 for the Disability Action Center. Above, members present the check to representatives of the center.



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Diocese Holds Reader Workshop for Parkersburg Vicariate



Courtesy Photo

On Sunday, December 10, over 30 parish lectors attended a Vicariate Reader Workshop hosted by St. Francis Xavier Parish in Parkersburg. The workshop was conducted by Dr. Bernadette Kime, diocesan director of the Office of Worship and Sacraments. Participants represented various parishes across the Parkersburg Vicariate. Bishop Mark Brennan has asked that these workshops be held across the state so Kime will be making her way around the diocese in the coming months.

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- 9:45 AM** Restoring Your Identity: Who You Are, Whose You Are, and Why You're Here
- 11:00 AM** The Most Important Thing: A Personal Relationship with Jesus
- 12:15 PM** Men's Lunch
- 12:45 PM** Men's Ministry Training

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Charles Town Parish Ministry Delivers 18,000 Pounds of Apples for Morgantown-Area Food Banks

MORGANTOWN—Monongalia County Commission President Tom Bloom said Dec. 5 was an extremely rewarding day.

“We received 4 pallets of apples (8,000 pounds) from St. Simon of Cyrene,” Bloom said in a Facebook post. “St. Simon of Cyrene is a ministry of St. James the Greater Catholic Church in Charles Town... Pick up and delivery of food are primarily handled by their parish volunteers. In 2022 the ministry delivered more than 290,000 pounds of food to more than 20 food pantries located in West Virginia, Virginia, and Pennsylvania.”

Representatives from Meals on Wheels, Healthy Kids, Operation Welcome Home, and Corner Cupboard Food Bank came to pick up the donated apples.

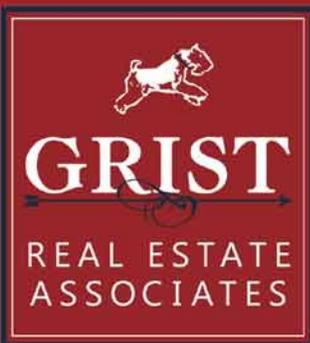
“We then were able to have deliveries to the outlying areas of our county,” Bloom said. “We also had 400 gallons of milk to be delivered.”

The St. Simon of Cyrene ministry was planning to deliver another 10,000 pounds of apples Dec. 14 or 15. Any organizations or non-profit groups that would like to pick up apples, should message Bloom on Facebook.



Some of the 18,000 pounds of apples and 400 gallons of milk are delivered in Morgantown for area food banks.

Courtesy Photo



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**DIOCESE OF
WHEELING-CHARLESTON**

Vatican Offers Further Guidance on Handling Cremains

By Carol Glatz

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The Vatican Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith has upheld a rule mandating that the ashes of the deceased be preserved in a consecrated place, but it also said family members could request “a minimal part of the ashes” be kept “in a place of significance for the history of the deceased person.”

The dicastery also said a parish or diocese could establish “a defined and permanent sacred place” where the cremains of multiple people would be commingled and preserved together.

The permission came in a “note” from the dicastery in response to a letter from Italian Cardinal Matteo Zuppi of Bologna requesting clarification about the preservation of the ashes of the deceased after cremation. The Vatican published the note signed by Cardinal Víctor Fernández, dicastery prefect, Dec. 12; it said it was approved by Pope Francis Dec. 9.

Cardinal Zuppi said in his letter, dated Oct. 30, that his archdiocese had been seeking “to give a Christian response to problems arising from the increasing number of people desiring to cremate the bodies of the deceased and scatter their ashes in nature.”

An archdiocesan commission he set up to study the matter wanted to ensure people were not compelled to scatter ashes due to the economic costs of burial, and it wanted to give guidance regarding what to do with ashes once the term for their preservation in a cemetery loculus or niche had expired. In most Italian cemeteries, if a family does not renew the lease on a burial spot, the bones or ashes are transferred to a communal ossuary or cinerary.

The cardinal asked that, given “the canonical prohibition against scattering the ashes of the deceased, is it possible to prepare a defined and permanent sacred place for the commingled

accumulation and preservation of the ashes of the baptized, indicating the basic details of each person so as not to lose the memory of their names, similar to what occurs in ossuaries.”

He also asked if a family may be allowed “to keep a portion of their family member’s ashes in a place that is significant for the history of the deceased.”

Referring to its 2016 instruction, “Ad resurgendum cum Christo” (“To Rise with Christ”), regarding the burial of the deceased and the conservation of the ashes in the case of cremation, the dicastery’s new note upheld its recommendation to preserve ashes in a special urn and to keep ashes “in a sacred place, such as a cemetery, or in an area dedicated to this purpose, provided that it has been so designated by the ecclesiastical authority.”

“An attitude of sacred respect” must be had toward the ashes of the deceased person, which are to be kept in “a sacred place suitable for prayer,” it added.

The faith teaches that “the body of the resurrected person will not necessarily consist of the same elements that it had before it died. Since it is not a simple revivification of the corpse, the resurrection can occur even if the body has been totally destroyed or dispersed,” it said. This is why “in many cinerary urns, the ashes of the deceased are conserved together and are not stored separately.”

Therefore, the dicastery said, “a defined and permanent sacred place can be set aside for the commingled accumulation and preservation of the ashes of deceased baptized persons, indicating the identity of each person so as not to lose the memory of their names.”

In addition, it said, “the ecclesiastical authority, in compliance with current civil norms, may consider and evaluate a request by a family to preserve in an appropriate way a minimal part of the ashes of their relative in a

place of significance for the history of the deceased person.”

However, the authorization can be given only if “every type of pantheistic, naturalistic or nihilistic misunderstanding is ruled out and also provided that the ashes of the deceased are kept in a sacred place,” the dicastery said.

The dicastery had issued an instruction in 1963 permitting cremation as long as it was not done as a sign of denial of the basic Christian belief in the resurrection of the dead. The permission was incorporated into the Code of Canon Law in 1983 and the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches in 1990.

However, since church law had not specified exactly what should be done with “cremains,” the dicastery provided further guidance with the 2016 instruction, “Ad resurgendum cum Christo” (“To Rise with Christ”).

That instruction emphasized the Catholic Church’s recommendation to follow “the most ancient Christian tradition” of the pious practice of burying the dead in cemeteries or other sacred places, as it is considered one of the cor-

poral works of mercy and, mirroring the burial of Christ, more clearly expresses hope in the resurrection when the person’s body and soul will be reunited.

Anonymous burial or scattering of ashes is not compatible with the Christian faith, according to the instruction. Preserving the ashes of the departed in a sacred place “ensures that they are not excluded from the prayers and remembrance of their family or the Christian community” and “it prevents any unfitting or superstitious practices.”

“The conservation of ashes of the departed in a domestic residence is not permitted,” the 2016 instruction said. “Only in grave and exceptional cases dependent on cultural conditions of a localized nature, may the Ordinary, in agreement with the Episcopal Conference or the Synod of Bishops of the Oriental Churches, concede permission for the conservation of the ashes of the departed in a domestic residence.”

“The ashes may not be divided among various family members and due respect must be maintained regarding the circumstances of such a conservation,” it said.

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



Para denunciar presuntos casos de abuso sexual de niños: La Diócesis de Wheeling-Charleston alienta a informar ante las autoridades civiles ante todo si se ha cometido un delito. También alentamos a utilizar www.reportbishopabuse.org para hacer un informe sobre cualquier obispo en los EE. UU. Si tiene motivos para creer que un obispo ha cometido una conducta sexual inapropiada, comuníquese con las autoridades civiles de la jurisdicción correspondiente y visite www.reportbishopabuse.org.

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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.

Para informar al Coordinador de Asistencia a Víctimas de la Diócesis: llame a la Erin McFarland, M.Ed., LPC, al 304.559.6742.

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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