

THE CATHOLIC

Spirit

Statement from Bishop Brennan on the Holy Father's 'Fiducia Supplicans' on The Pastoral Meaning of Blessings

The Holy Father's Declaration today (Dec. 18) in his 'Fiducia Supplicans' On the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings confirms the Church's teaching on the Sacrament of Marriage—which is the "exclusive, stable, and indissoluble union between a man and a woman, naturally open to the generation of children." Anything contrary to that is disordered. This is why the Catholic Church cannot bless a same-sex union as marriage or a heterosexual union until the freedom of each partner is established.

See full story on Page 3

The Holy Father also says, "One who asks for a blessing show(s) himself to be in need of God's saving presence in his life and one who asks for a blessing from the Church recognizes the Church as the sacrament of the salvation that God offers. To seek a blessing in the Church is to acknowledge that the life of the Church springs from the womb of God's mercy and helps us to move forward, to live better, and to respond to the Lord's will." In other words, when we ask for a blessing, we are telling God, "I need your help. I need your grace to live better and in accord with your will." The blessings proposed by the Holy Father today are a blessing of persons in their relationship with God and a strengthening, healing and perfecting of their relationship with one another with the goal of helping them live according to God's will. Such blessings are for everyone.

While today's declaration raises a number of questions and will likely be misinterpreted by those outside of our faith, one thing remains true—each and every human being is a child of God, and God loves all of His children, and His love for us is bigger than the sins we commit.

St. Patrick's Students Show All the Reason for the Season



Courtesy Photo
Students from St. Patrick School in Weston beautifully depicted the birth of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ on their float for Weston's Christmas parade. The school thanked Shelia and Asia Sumpter, Sean and Rachel Smith, Coretta and Elizabeth Jefferson, Terry and Yonnie Southhall, and Laura and Mackenzie Murphy for their time and effort with the float this year and all the students that participated and handed out candy. (Courtesy Photo)

Confused about the Christmas 2023 Obligation This Year?

You Need to Go to Mass for Both Sunday and Christmas Day; Faithful Must Attend Two Masses, U.S. Bishops Explain

Mary Farrow/Catholic News Agency

Christmas Eve is also the Fourth Sunday of Advent this year. That means the faithful must attend two Masses to meet their Sunday and Christmas Day obligations.

In a newsletter issued in early 2017, the U.S. Catholic bishops addressed questions regarding whether Sunday and holy day Mass obligations can be fulfilled with a "two-for-one" Mass attendance at Christmas. In a "relatively rare" situation, which last occurred in 2017, Christmas Day this year falls on a Monday.

Because Catholics are obliged to attend Mass for Sundays and holy days of obligation, some have asked whether a Sunday evening Mass on Christmas Eve would fulfill both the obligation for a Sunday Mass and the obligation for a Christmas Day Mass.

The U.S. Bishops' Committee on Divine Worship has said the faithful should attend two Masses to fulfill their Sunday and Christmas Mass obligations.

Since the mid-20th century, the Church has allowed for Catholics to attend vigil, or anticipated, Masses for Sundays and holy days of obligation as "a convenience for many of the faithful."

"Most canon lawyers defer to Venerable Pope Pius XII's Apostolic Constitution 'Christus Dominus' (January 6, 1953), which gave 4:00 p.m. as the earliest time when anticipated Masses may be scheduled," the bishops said in their 2017 letter, which referenced this occurrence would again happen in 2023. The bishops' past letter includes a reference chart of similar situations through 2030.

This means that the Sunday obligation for Sunday, Dec. 24, can be fulfilled on Sunday morning, or any

time after 4 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 23. The Christmas Mass obligation can be fulfilled on Christmas day (Monday, Dec. 25) or any time after 4 p.m. on Christmas Eve (Sunday, Dec. 24.)

In the case of two consecutive days of obligation, as at Christmas this year, the "prevailing view of many canon lawyers is that each obligation must be fulfilled with a separate Mass," the bishops said.

"Thus, when consecutive obligations occur on Saturday-Sunday or Sunday-Monday, the faithful must attend Mass twice to fulfill two separate obligations."

According to the bishops, the question of whether such obligations could be fulfilled in one Mass has been raised before by bishops in what is called a *dubium*, which was "answered in the negative by the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy and approved by Blessed Pope Paul VI in 1970."

"The Church's intention in extending the possibility of meeting Mass obligations through vigil Masses, while intended to make it easier to fulfill obligations, was never envisioned as a legal loophole, and, hence, separate obligations remain," the bishops said.

The bishops emphasized that they hoped that Catholics "foster a love for the Sacred Liturgy and hold a desire to celebrate the holy days as fully as is reasonably possible."

They also noted that pastors may grant dispensations to individuals or families "for a just cause and subject to any regulations laid down by the diocesan bishop."

"At the same time, diocesan bishops may examine their regional circumstances and grant general dispensations or commutations, while permitting their pastors to make judgments in individual cases."

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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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.



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Doctrinal Declaration Opens Possibility to Bless Couples in Irregular Situations

With the Declaration ‘*Fiducia supplicans*’ issued by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, approved by Pope Francis, it will be possible to bless same-sex couples but without any type of ritualization or offering the impression of a marriage. The doctrine regarding marriage does not change, and the blessing does not signify approval of the union.

By Vatican News

When two people request a blessing, even if their situation as a couple is “irregular,” it will be possible for the ordained minister to consent. However, this gesture of pastoral closeness must avoid any elements that remotely resemble a marriage rite.

This is what is stated the Declaration “*Fiducia supplicans*” on the pastoral meaning of blessings, published by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and approved by Pope Francis.

The document explores the theme of blessings, distinguishing between ritual and liturgical ones, and spontaneous ones more akin to signs of popular devotion. It is precisely in this second category there is now consideration of the possibility of welcoming even those who do not live according to the norms of Christian moral doctrine but humbly request to be blessed. 23 years have passed since the former “Holy Office” published a Declaration (the last one was in August 2000 with “*Dominus Jesus*”), a document of such doctrinal importance.

“*Fiducia supplicans*” begins with the introduction by the prefect, Cardinal Victor Fernandez, who explains that the Declaration considers the “pastoral meaning of blessings,” allowing “a broadening and enrichment of the classical understanding” through a theological reflection “based on the pastoral vision of Pope Francis.”

It is a reflection that “implies a real development from what has been said about blessings up until now, reaching an understanding of the possibility “of blessing couples in irregular situations and same-sex couples without officially validating their status or changing in any way the Church’s perennial teaching on marriage.”

After the first paragraphs (1-3) that recall the previous pronouncement of 2021 that is now further developed and superseded, the Declaration presents the blessing in the Sacrament of Marriage (paragraphs 4-6) stating as inadmissible “rites and prayers that could create confusion between what constitutes marriage” and “what contradicts it,” by avoiding any implication that “something that is not marriage is being recognized as marriage.” It is reiterated that according to the “perennial Catholic doc-

trine” only sexual relations between a man and a woman in the context of marriage are considered lawful.

A second extensive part of the Declaration (paragraphs 7-30) analyzes the meaning of different blessings, whose recipients are people, objects of worship, and places of life. It is recalled that “from a strictly liturgical point of view,” the blessing requires that what is blessed “be conformed to God’s will, as expressed in the teachings of the Church.”

Click here to read the full text of ‘*Fiducia Supplicans*’ on The Pastoral Meaning of Blessings

“When a blessing is invoked on certain human relationships” through a special liturgical rite, the Declaration notes, “it is necessary that what is blessed corresponds with God’s designs written in creation” (par. 11). Therefore, the Church does not have the power to impart a liturgical blessing on irregular or same-sex couples. It is also necessary to avoid the risk of reducing the meaning of blessings to this point of view only, expecting for a simple blessing “the same moral conditions for a simple blessing that are called for in the reception of the sacraments” (par. 12).

After analyzing blessings in Scripture, the Declaration offers a theological-pastoral understanding. Those who ask for a blessing show themselves “to be in need of God’s saving presence” in their lives by expressing “a petition for God’s assistance, a plea to live better” (par. 21). This request should be received and valued “outside of a liturgical framework” when found “in a realm of greater spontaneity and freedom” (par. 23).

When seeing them from the perspective of popular piety, “blessings should be evaluated as acts of devotion.” Those requesting a blessing “should not be required to have prior moral perfection” as a precondition, the Declaration notes.

Exploring this distinction, based on the response of Pope Francis to the dubia published last October that called for discernment on the

possibility of “forms of blessing, requested by one or more persons, that do not convey an erroneous conception of marriage” (par. 26), the Declaration affirms that this kind of blessing “is offered to all without requiring anything,” helping people feel that they are still blessed despite their mistakes and that “their heavenly Father continues to will their good and to hope that they will ultimately open themselves to the good” (par. 27).

There are “several occasions when people spontaneously ask for a blessing, whether on pilgrimages, at shrines, or even on the street when they meet a priest and these blessings “are meant for everyone; no one is to be excluded from them” (par. 28).

While it is not appropriate to establish “procedures or rituals” for such cases, the ordained minister may join in the prayer of those persons who “although in a union that cannot be compared in any way to a marriage, desire to entrust themselves to the Lord and his mercy, to invoke his help, and to be guided to a greater understanding of his plan of love and of truth” (par. 30).

The third part of the Declaration (paragraphs 31-41) opens then to the possibility of these blessings that represent a sign for those who “recognizing themselves to be destitute and in need of his help—do not claim a legitimization of their own status, but who beg that all that is true, good, and humanly valid in their lives and their relationships be enriched, healed, and elevated by the presence of the Holy Spirit” (par. 31).

These blessings should not necessarily become the norm, the Statement notes, but entrusted to “a practical discernment in particular circumstances” (par. 37).

Although the couple is blessed but not the union, the Declaration notes that what is blessed is the legitimate relationship between the two people: in “a brief prayer preceding this spontaneous blessing, the ordained minister could ask that the individuals have peace, health, a spirit of patience, dialogue, and mutual assistance—but also God’s light and strength to be able to fulfill his will completely” (par. 38).

Also clarified is that to avoid “any form of confusion or scandal,” that when a couple in an irregular situation or same-sex couples ask for a blessing, it “should never be imparted in concurrence with the ceremonies of a civil union, and not even in connection with them. Nor can it be performed with any clothing, gestures, or words that are proper to a wedding” (par. 39). This kind of blessing “may instead find its place in other contexts, such as a visit to a shrine, a meeting with a priest, a prayer recited in a group, or during a pilgrimage” (par. 40).

In conclusion, the fourth chapter (paragraphs 42-45) recalls that “even when a person’s relationship with God is clouded by sin, he can always ask for a blessing, stretching out his hand to God” and desiring a blessing “can be the possible good in some situations” (par. 43).

Collection...

Cont'd from Page 2

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Effort Brings Thanksgiving and Christmas to Less Fortunate in Braxton and Clay Counties



Courtesy Photo

Christmas presents for less fortunate families of Braxton and Clay counties fill the pews at Risen Lord Church in Clay.

By Colleen Rowan

They unloaded and prepackaged boxes in the evening and then began the food distribution at 6 a.m. There were so many cars in line for the Thanksgiving food boxes, Father Thien Duc Nguyen, SVD, said, “We had to call the sheriff to help control the traffic.”

The need in Braxton and Clay counties is great, and Father Thien’s Parish of St. Thomas in Gassaway and Risen Lord Mission in Clay, where he is pastor, try to meet that need each year. These two faith communities sponsor the Thanksgiving boxes for less fortunate people and families every November. Father Thien and his dedicated army of volunteers from the two churches distributed 350 turkeys and 20,000 pounds of food to 429 families last month. A total of 96 families (231 individuals) received food at St. Thomas Church and 333 families (more than 750 individuals) received food at Risen Lord Food Pantry at the church.

None of the people who came to receive the food were parishioners, and in all the two faith communities made sure 1,000 individuals in need in the area had Thanksgiving dinner.

“At the end we are tired,” Father Thien said, “but joyful since we saw many smiles on people’s faces when they received turkey, flour, and food for Thanksgiving. We feel so glad that they had something on their table this Thanksgiving to share...”

One of his parishioners said this was the largest food distribution they have ever had in the two churches. The churches are blessed, he said, that God still sends many benefactors and uses their hands as his instrument to share His blessings with those less fortunate. All who help support this ministry of the parish should know they have made Thanksgiving a great day for many.

“One woman told me that she loved turkey, but she hadn’t been able to afford turkey for years,”



Courtesy Photo

Volunteers prepare Thanksgiving food boxes at Risen Lord Food Pantry in Clay.

Father Thien said. “She is tremendously grateful to have had one this year.”

Father Thien especially thanked the Society of the Divine Word and its benefactors who raised \$1,142 for the effort; the Knights of Columbus Council 12630 in Charleston which

raised \$2,735 and brought a truck load of canned goods for the effort; parishioners of both the Basilica of the Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Charleston and St. James the Greater Parish in Charles Town for their donations and support; the Pittsburgh

Oratory which donated \$6,000; and “all benefactors who support us for this Thanksgiving distribution.”

One of the many benefactors is Charleston Catholic High School which goes above and beyond
See “Effort” on Page 6

Effort...

Cont'd from Page 5

each year to bring Christmas to children in need of the area. On Dec. 2, CCHS students along with the churches sponsored the annual Christmas party for 118 families who had their pictures taken with Santa and Mrs. Claus, enjoyed hot chocolate and homemade cookies, and picked up stockings, presents, and food boxes. CCHS students distributed 320 presents and 220 food boxes, along with boxes of cookies and other treats and supplies.

CCHS has partnered with Risen Lord Mission for more than 30 years to plan and carry out the project and "bring so much joy for the kids in Clay County," Father Thien said, adding that he is grateful for these annual activities of CCHS students.

"I'm glad to see many young people come out in early morning to bring joy and help others," he said. "They bring many smiles to the kids' faces and they make someone's Christmas more blessed this year again."

The churches sponsored another gathering for those in need.

"At St. Thomas we distributed about 10,000 pounds of food and 250 Christmas gifts for 123 families on Dec. 14.," Father Thien said. "At Risen Lord, we distributed more than 20,000 pounds of food and 750 Christmas gifts for 324 families today (Dec 21.)."

The gifts were donated by Appalachian Christmas Project.



Charleston Catholic High School students unload provisions for the annual Christmas party for children and their families at Risen Lord Food Pantry in Clay. Courtesy Photo

"We are so glad that many families have food this Christmas!" Father Thien said. "Many thanks to all benefactors and volunteers!"

To help support Risen Lord Food

Pantry, food can be brought to Risen Lord or St. Thomas churches, but first call Father Thien at (304) 364-5895 or send email to tdnguyen@dwc.org.

To offer financial support,

checks may be made out to and sent to: St. Thomas Social Concern Fund or Risen Lord Catholic Social Concern Fund, c/o: St. Thomas Catholic Church, 624 Kanawha St., Gassaway, WV 26624.

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Courtesy Photo

Bishop Mark Brennan, second from right, and Father Sravan Kumar Reddimasu, pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in Stonewood, are pictured with Santa Claus and young parishioners.

Bishop Brennan Spends Weekend of Gaudete Sunday with Faithful at Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Stonewood

STONEWOOD — Bishop Mark Brennan spent the weekend of Dec. 16-17 at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in Stonewood—the Third Sunday of Advent—the Third Sunday of Advent. He started his day joining the aspirants of the Permanent Diaconate Formation Program, who meet monthly at OLPH. The bishop spent time with the men discussing vocations and discernment.

He then celebrated all three Masses for Gaudete Sunday with the message: “...for us all to discover what we are meant to do, without overreaching, to include that of service to others.” He quoted...as in the Acts of the Apostles (20:35) where “St. Paul reminds us, ‘Remember what the Lord Jesus said — It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

The bishop finished his weekend in Stonewood celebrating with the faithful at the Parish Christmas Party. There, he was presented with a cutting board etched with the Icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. His Christmas blessing to the parish was: “Remember that God came



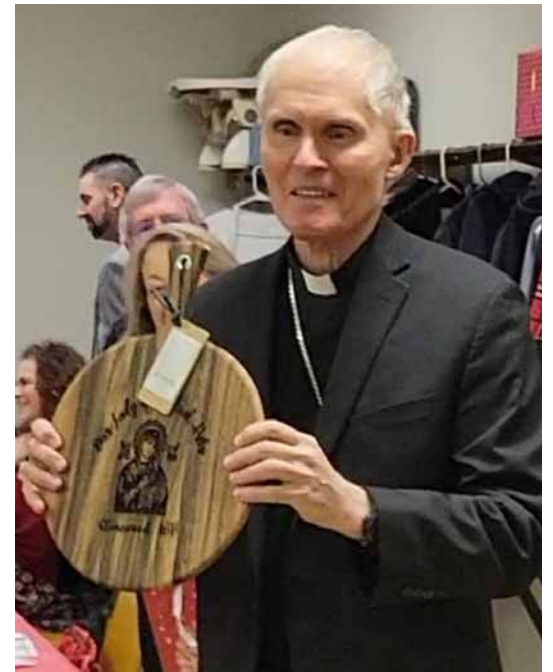
Left: Children of the parish who had their First Penance and Reconciliation are pictured. Right: Bishop Brennan holds the gift he received from the parish—a cutting board etched with the Icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

down to be with us as a weak and vulnerable child as we are in our own lives. Let us all remember the true meaning of Christmas.”

It was also a big weekend for

children of the parish who had their First Penance and Reconciliation in preparation for their First Communion in the spring. This was topped off by a celebration with their families. Thanks

to Tonya Blackburn, their teacher, and Mary Shields, director of Religious Education for the parish. The kids cannot wait for the spring for their First Communion.



Courtesy Photo



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Celebrating the Incarnation, Remember Bethlehem, Too, Pope Says

By Cindy Wooden

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — When St. Francis of Assisi staged the first Nativity scene 800 years ago, he did so to remind people of the powerful, awe-inspiring truth that God became human in Jesus, Pope Francis said.

Nativity scenes are not simply works of art or folk art, the pope told hundreds of people involved in staging a live Nativity scene at the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome Dec. 16.

Dressed as angels, shepherds, the Holy Family and the townspeople of Bethlehem 2,000 years ago, the amateur actors met Pope Francis in the Vatican audience hall just a few hours before their performance began.

When St. Francis staged a similar living Nativity in 1223, the pope said, he wanted “to represent in life the birth of Jesus to inspire in friars and in the people emotion and tenderness toward the mystery of God born of Mary in a stable and laid in a manger.”

The live setting, he said, was designed “to give substance to the representation — not a painting, not statues, but people in flesh and blood, in order to highlight the reality of the Incarnation.”

As St. Francis knew, “the purpose of the living Nativity scene is to reawaken wonder in the heart before the mystery of God who became a child.”

Pope Francis said that especially this year people should keep the people of Bethlehem in mind when they see a living Nativity scene or a crèche in a home or church. “For them, it promises to be a Christmas of suffering, of mourning, without pilgrims, without celebra-

tions.”

“And naturally this extends to all the inhabitants of the land where Jesus was born, lived, died and rose again,” he said. “We know the situation caused by the war, the consequence of a conflict that has lasted for decades.”

Immediately after meeting the living Nativity characters, Pope Francis held an audience with musicians who would perform that evening in a Christmas concert at the Vatican to raise money for Catholic education.

The pope spoke of the importance of songs as ways to hand down “stories and prayers” and express what people are thinking and feeling in a way words alone cannot do.

“Just think of all those teenagers who sing the songs of their favorite artists by heart because those words and music combine to evoke in them a powerful blend of emotions and associations,” he said.

Down through the ages, he said, Christmas has inspired a treasure trove of songs among people of all ages and all cultures.

And performers, lending their voices and vocal interpretations to those melodies become part of the tradition, he said.

“There is something beautiful about this,” the pope said. “We have a message, ancient yet ever new, that of the birth of Jesus, the Savior, and different voices, from all over the world, that come together to make it heard.”

Christmas songs are never “uniform, homogenized,” he said. “Christmas carols are to be sung with that art that comes from the heart.”

A Survey for Faithful in Berkeley County and surrounding area only

For input on desire for a Catholic high school in the area

Because time is of the essence, faithful in Berkeley County and the surrounding area only are asked to complete this survey as soon as possible by **CLICKING HERE** or scanning the QR code shown below and share it with anyone who might be interested. Your feedback is greatly appreciated.



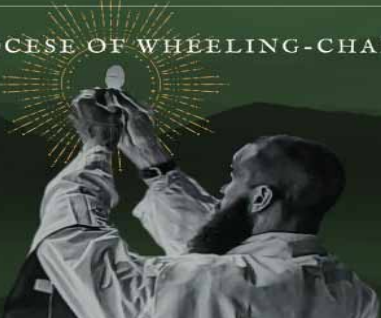
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Cardinal Becciu, Five Others Sentenced to Prison at Vatican Trial

By **Cindy Wooden**

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The Vatican City State criminal court sentenced Cardinal Angelo Becciu to five years and six months in prison on two counts of embezzlement and one of aggravated fraud but found him not guilty of abuse of office or witness tampering.

The 75-year-old cardinal's attorney, Fabio Vegliione, told reporters his client would appeal.

The three-judge panel of the Vatican court handed down the verdicts late Dec. 16. In addition to Cardinal Becciu, five other people were sentenced to jail time ranging from three years to seven years and were ordered to pay the Vatican millions of dollars in damages.

Pending appeal, none of the six people given jail terms were taken into custody.

Only one of the 10 defendants, Msgr. Mauro Carlino, the former secretary of then-Archbishop Becciu when he served as "sostituto," the No. 3 position in the Vatican Secretariat of State, was found not guilty of all charges.

Enrico Crasso, a long-time investment manager who

often worked with the Vatican, received the stiffest sentence: seven years in jail.

René Brülhart and Tommaso di Ruzza, respectively former president and former director of the Vatican's financial watchdog agency, now known as the Supervisory and Financial Information Authority, were "absolved" of the charge of abuse of office but were found guilty of negligence for not reporting a suspect financial operation. They each were fined 1,750 euros (\$1,900).

The trial revolved around the Vatican's investment in a property in London's chic Chelsea district. But the way the deal was structured and restructured ended up costing the Vatican as much as \$200 million. Cardinal Becciu was the No. 3 official at the Vatican Secretariat of State when the property deal, using money invested by the secretariat, was first made in 2014. The cardi-

nal and three others — Raffaele Mincione, Fabrizio Tirabassi and Enrico Crasso — were found guilty of embezzlement for taking \$200.5 million from the Secretariat of State's investment fund — a third of the entire fund — and investing it with Athena Capital Commodities.

The court described the fund as being "highly speculative" and risky, which violated Vatican guidelines and canon law on the use of church funds.

Mincione, who ran Athena Capital, was found guilty of money laundering for using the Vatican funds to buy the London property, but the court said Cardinal Becciu, Tirabassi and Crasso were not responsible for the London property disaster because they had no control over the money once it was invested with Athena. The cardinal also was accused of embezzling money that he gave to a Caritas project

run by his brother in Sardinia and for aggravated fraud for giving more than 570,000 euros of Vatican money to a woman named Cecilia Marogna, who claimed she could help win the release of a nun kidnapped in Mali.

Marogna was found guilty of being complicit in the aggravated fraud and was sentenced to three years and nine months in jail.

Nicola Squillace, a Milan-based lawyer who helped broker the London property deal, was given a 22-month suspended sentence.

The Vatican tribunal said it would confiscate the equivalent of about \$181 million from those found guilty and ordered them to pay another \$218 million in damages to the Secretariat of State, the Vatican bank, the Administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See, and Supervisory and Financial Information Authority.

The verdicts were an-

nounced two and a half years after the trial began; 86 court sessions were held with more than 600 hours of testimony by some 69 witnesses. Hundreds of thousands of pages of documents, emails, text messages and transcripts of phone conversations were entered into evidence.

All together, 10 people and four companies had been charged with 49 crimes including bribery, embezzlement, abuse of office, money laundering, fraud and, in Cardinal Becciu's case, witness tampering, a charge for which the court said it found no evidence.

In April 2021, the pope updated the laws governing the Vatican's civil judicial system, stating that cardinals and bishops accused of a crime could be tried in a Vatican court, which, as it turned out, paved the way for the indictment three months later against Cardinal Becciu.

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- 9:45 AM** Restoring Your Identity: Who You Are, Whose You Are, and Why You're Here
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Pro-Life Group Offers ‘Window to the Womb’ in New Online Experience

By Joe Bukuras/Catholic News Agency

Have you ever wondered what it'd be like to have a window into the womb?

Well, that's exactly what the pro-life group Live Action has attempted to provide with its new interactive website windowtothewomb.app.

The website launched Dec. 14 walks users through each trimester of pregnancy, day by day, by presenting an animated baby's development starting from conception.

"The main idea behind the web app was to present something groundbreaking and something that was medically accurate," Live Action spokeswoman Christina Bennett told CNA Friday.

Users can either watch an animated video that progresses through each day of development or they can click through each week at their own speed. When clicking through the weeks, users will be able to read notes on the screen that describe certain aspects of the child's development.

At the eight-week stage, one note says: "At eight weeks, (six weeks from fertilization) brain waves can be recorded."

At the 15-week stage, another note says: "Teeth! At 15 weeks, tooth development begins."

Bennett said the website was made with the help of medical doctors and other medical professionals. She added that its production was in response, in part, to the misinformation about life in the womb that often circulates, such as the idea that a preborn baby is just a "clump of cells."

"So we really wanted to combat this misinformation with groundbreaking, medically accurate, beautifully animated images of the baby growing in the womb to educate people, but also to give them an eye-opening, enlightening experience where they get to see what is really going on," she said.

"That's why we call it a window to the womb," she said.

The website also includes a button that says "Pregnant & Need Help?" Clicking that link takes users to Live Action's website where it offers several options to women who are either considering abortion, have had an abortion, have taken the abortion pill, are employed as an abortion worker, or are interested in adoption.

When entering the website, users can choose a name and the biological

sex of the baby they are seeing develop.

Bennett said Live Action's goal is for "everyone" to use the website, including those who work in pro-life pregnancy centers, which are institutions that help pregnant women in need of support.

Diane Ferraro, CEO of Save The Storks, a large network of pro-life mobile medical clinics, said in an article on Live Action's website: "Sharing Window to the Womb with women who board our mobile medical clinics will provide another compelling reason to make the decision for life for their babies."

Another pro-life leader, president of Heartbeat International Jor-El Godsey, said: "It's well said that 'people perish for lack of knowledge.' This is



Photo courtesy of windowtothewomb.app

Live Action's new website on the development of a child through pregnancy, windowtothewomb.app.

no more true than with the knowledge of fetal development."

"Live Action's Window to the Womb is a visually powerful tool in ministering to those who are unexpectedly pregnant and need to know what is actually happening with the

life developing within them. From the sidewalk to the center or from the church to the kitchen table, this is a tool for anyone to champion life," he said.

The website can be accessed at <http://www.windowtothewomb.app>

Walking with
Moms in Need



Walking with Moms in Need is a nationwide, parish-based initiative to increase support for pregnant and parenting mothers in need. It works to ensure that any woman who finds herself unexpectedly pregnant, or parenting in difficult circumstances, can turn to her local Catholic Church and be connected with the resources she needs. Volunteers walk with moms throughout the motherhood journey, offering them authentic Christian friendship and ongoing support.

Click here to learn more

To start this ministry in your parish, contact:

Kathleen Barton, Director of Social Ministry for the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston (304) 233-0880, Ext. 289; kbarton@dwc.org



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Al celebrar la Encarnación, acuérdense de Belén, dice el Papa

Por Cindy Wooden, Catholic News Service

CIUDAD DEL VATICANO (CNS) — Cuando San Francisco de Asís escenificó el primer Belén hace 800 años, lo hizo para recordar a la gente la poderosa y asombrosa verdad de que Dios se hizo humano en Jesús, dijo el Papa Francisco.

Los belenes, nacimientos o pesebres no son simples obras de arte o arte popular, dijo el Papa a cientos de personas que participaron en la escenificación de un belén viviente en la Basílica de Santa María la Mayor de Roma el 16 de diciembre.

Vestidos como ángeles, pastores, la Sagrada Familia y los habitantes de Belén hace 2.000 años, actores aficionados se reunieron con el Papa Francisco en la sala de audiencias del Vaticano pocas horas antes de que comenzara la representación. Cuando San Francisco escenificó una Natividad viv-

iente similar en 1223, dijo el Papa, quería "representar en vivo el nacimiento de Jesús para suscitar en los frailes y en la gente la conmoción, la ternura ante el misterio de Dios nacido de María en un establo y depositado en un pesebre".

El pesebre vivo, dijo, fue diseñado "para dar concreción a la representación -- no un cuadro, no estatuas, sino personas de carne y hueso, para resaltar la realidad de la Encarnación".

Como sabía San Francisco, "el pesebre viviente tiene por objeto despertar en el corazón el asombro ante el misterio de Dios que se hizo niño".

El Papa Francisco dijo que, especialmente este año, la gente debería tener presente al pueblo de Belén cuando vea un belén viviente o un nacimiento en una casa o en la parroquia. "Para ellos promete ser una Navidad de dolor, de luto, sin pere-

grinos, sin celebraciones".

"Y naturalmente esto se extiende a todos los habitantes de la tierra donde Jesús nació, vivió, murió y resucitó", dijo. "Conocemos la situación causada por la guerra, consecuencia de un conflicto que ha durado décadas".

Inmediatamente después de reunirse con los personajes vivientes del Nacimiento, el Papa Francisco mantuvo una audiencia con los músicos que actuarían esa noche en un concierto de Navidad en el Vaticano para recaudar fondos para la educación católica.

El Papa habló de la importancia de las canciones como formas de transmitir "historias y oraciones" y expresar lo que la gente está pensando y sintiendo de una manera que las palabras por sí solas no pueden hacer.

"Basta pensar en todos esos adolescentes que cantan de memoria

las canciones de sus artistas favoritos porque esas palabras y esa música se combinan para evocar en ellos una poderosa mezcla de emociones y asociaciones", dijo.

A lo largo de los siglos, la Navidad ha inspirado un tesoro de canciones a personas de todas las edades y culturas.

Y los intérpretes, prestando sus voces e interpretaciones vocales a esas melodías, se convierten en parte de la tradición, dijo.

"Hay algo hermoso en todo esto", dijo el Papa. "Tenemos un mensaje — antiguo, pero siempre nuevo — el del nacimiento de Jesús, el Salvador. Y voces diferentes, de todo el mundo, que se unen para hacerlo oír".

Las canciones navideñas nunca son "uniformes, homogeneizadas", dijo. "Los villancicos deben cantarse con ese arte que sale del corazón".

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.

Para informar a las autoridades civiles: comuníquese con la policía local; los números variarán según su ubicación. Si cree que alguien está en peligro inmediato, llame al 911. Para informar confidencialmente cualquier incidencia de sospecha de abuso o negligencia infantil, incluido el abuso sexual, comuníquese con la Oficina de Servicios de Protección Infantil de Niños y Familias de West Virginia llamando a la línea directa de abuso infantil al 800.352.6513. Puede informar anonimamente a esta línea directa si lo prefiere.

Para informar a las autoridades diocesanas: La diócesis alienta a informar a las autoridades civiles apropiadas, ante todo, si se ha cometido un delito. La diócesis también alienta a informar a las autoridades eclesásticas apropiadas. Para reportar casos sospechosos de abuso sexual de niños por parte del personal de la Diócesis de Wheeling-Charleston a la Diócesis, comuníquese con uno de los siguientes designados al 1.888.434.6237 o 304.233.0880: Sr. Bryan Minor, ext. 263; Sr. Tim Bishop, ext. 353; Muy Reverendo Dennis Schuelkens, Jr., V.E., ext. 270; o Sor Martha Gómez, ext. 264. También puede llamar a la Oficina

de Ambiente Seguro de la Diócesis al 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 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 Niños: 304-293-6400.

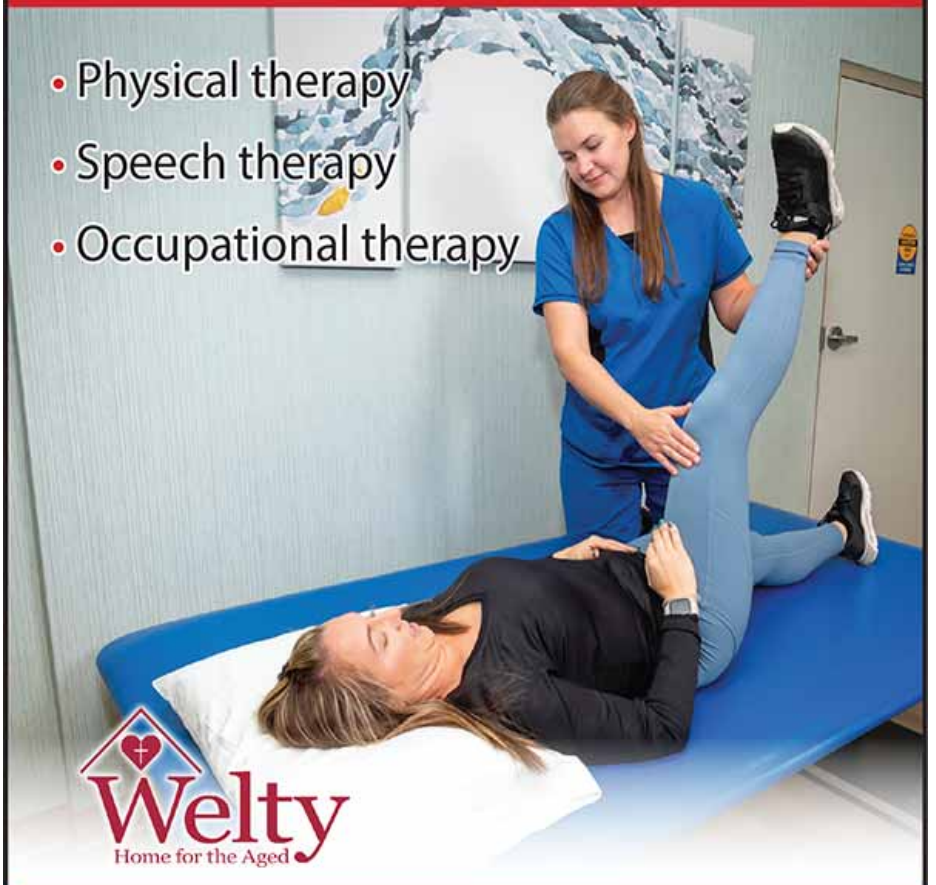


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