January 16, 2026 Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston Vol. 56, No. 3

THE CATHOLIC Spirit

A Letter from Bishop Brennan Inviting Parishes to Participate in the Catholic Committee of Appalachia's Conversations in the Spirit

January 14, 2026

Dear Brothers in Christ and Pastoral Staff,

As we continue to celebrate the 175th anniversary of our Diocese by remembering the 50th anniversary of the Appalachian pastoral letter *This Land is Home to Me*, I invite our parishes to participate in the Catholic Committee of Appalachia's (CCA) initiative to commemorate this letter. The CCA currently has fourteen Dioceses, including ours, who have agreed to continue the listening that provided the substance of the original pastoral.

Now, using the synodal method of Conversations in the Spirit, I encourage your parish to engage in one or more of these Conversations in the Spirit, following the CCA's guidelines which you will find here: https://www.ccappal.org/conversationsinthespirit.

As you do so, ideally as part of your parish's Lenten journey, I feel confident these experiences of Conversations in the Spirit designed to hear the cries of the poor will

• be a sign of our unity with the Church in Appalachia,

• demonstrate a concern for the poor and those who serve them through your parish,

• uncover the degree to which the original themes of the pastoral letter remain relevant,

• provide a means to report these discoveries to CCA who will then collate them and send them to the Bishops of Appalachia,

• illuminate areas where your parish is called to discern a response to the cries of the poor within your sphere of influence,

• offer those who currently serve the poor through the ministries of your parish a venue to share their experiences and responses,

See "Bishop" on Page 2

Pope Delivers Fierce Defense of the Unborn

By Paulina Guzik, OSV News

ROME (OSV News) — Pope Leo XIV strongly defended the family, marriage and unborn life during his first-ever New Year's address to the diplomatic corps Jan. 9, telling the diplomats accredited to the Holy See that abortion "cuts short a growing life and refuses to welcome the gift of life."

"The vocation to love and to life," he continued, "manifests itself in an important way in the exclusive and indissoluble union between a woman and a man."

"The institution of the family faces two crucial challenges today," the pope said, naming "a worrying tendency in the international system to neglect and underestimate its fundamental social role, leading to its progressive institutional marginalization," and "the growing and painful reality of fragile, broken and suffering families, afflicted by internal difficulties and disturbing phenomena, including domestic violence."

The vocation "to love and to life," the pope said, "manifests itself in an important way in the exclusive and indissoluble union between a woman and a man," he said of traditional marriage, and "implies a fundamental ethical imperative for enabling families to welcome and fully care for unborn life."

Calling it "increasingly a priority,

See "Pope" on Page 4

Young Parishioner of Keyser's Assumption Parish had Great Honor at Christmas Mass

Aubrey Amoroso, a first-grade student in the religious education program at Assumption Parish in Keyser, had the great honor of carrying the statue of Baby Jesus to the manger during the procession at the 4 p.m. Christmas Vigil Mass. Aubrey is pictured here holding the statue of Baby Jesus at the church. She is the daughter of Steven and Ashley Amoroso.

Courtesy photo

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9 DAYS FOR LIFE

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Bishop ...

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• provide the spark for parish pastoral planning and budgeting for the care of the poor close to your parish.

In addition to these concrete benefits, your participation in these listening sessions carries out an element of our Diocesan Evangelization Plan, while embracing the vision of synodality Pope Leo XIV desires to see flourish in the universal Church.

To assist you in this, I have enlisted the assistance of Dr. Rodica Stoicoiu and Mrs. Deborah Stollery who are available to assist you through training facilitators, answering questions, clarifying intent, promoting this initiative, and where geographically feasible, facilitating these conversations should you be unable to find a suitable facilitator. Their contact information is:

Rodica M. M. Stoiciou, Ph.D
240-313-0062
rodicastoicoiuphd@gmail.com

Mrs. Deborah Stollery, M.A.
757-470-9636
deborah.stollery@gmail.com

I encourage you and your parish to participate in these Conversations in the Spirit. May God bless you!

Sincerely in Christ,

+Mark E. Brennan

+Mark E. Brennan
Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston

Correction:

A story on Page 4 of the January 9, 2026, issue of The Catholic Spirit with the headline "Eastern, Western Faiths Unite in Weirton" mistakenly used the word "faith." The word "Churches" or "Rites" is correct.

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://dhhr.wv.gov/bss/services/Pages/Centralized-Intake-for-Abuse-and-Neglect.aspx 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. 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

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Office: 1322 Eoff St.
Mailing: PO Box 230
Wheeling, WV 26003
(304) 232-0444

thecatholicspiritwv.org
dwc.org

Publisher: Bishop Mark E. Brennan .....
Executive Editor: Colleen Rowan, Ext. 347.....crowan@dwc.org
Advertising: contact Colleen Rowan
Freelance Writers: Martina Hart, John Sherwood
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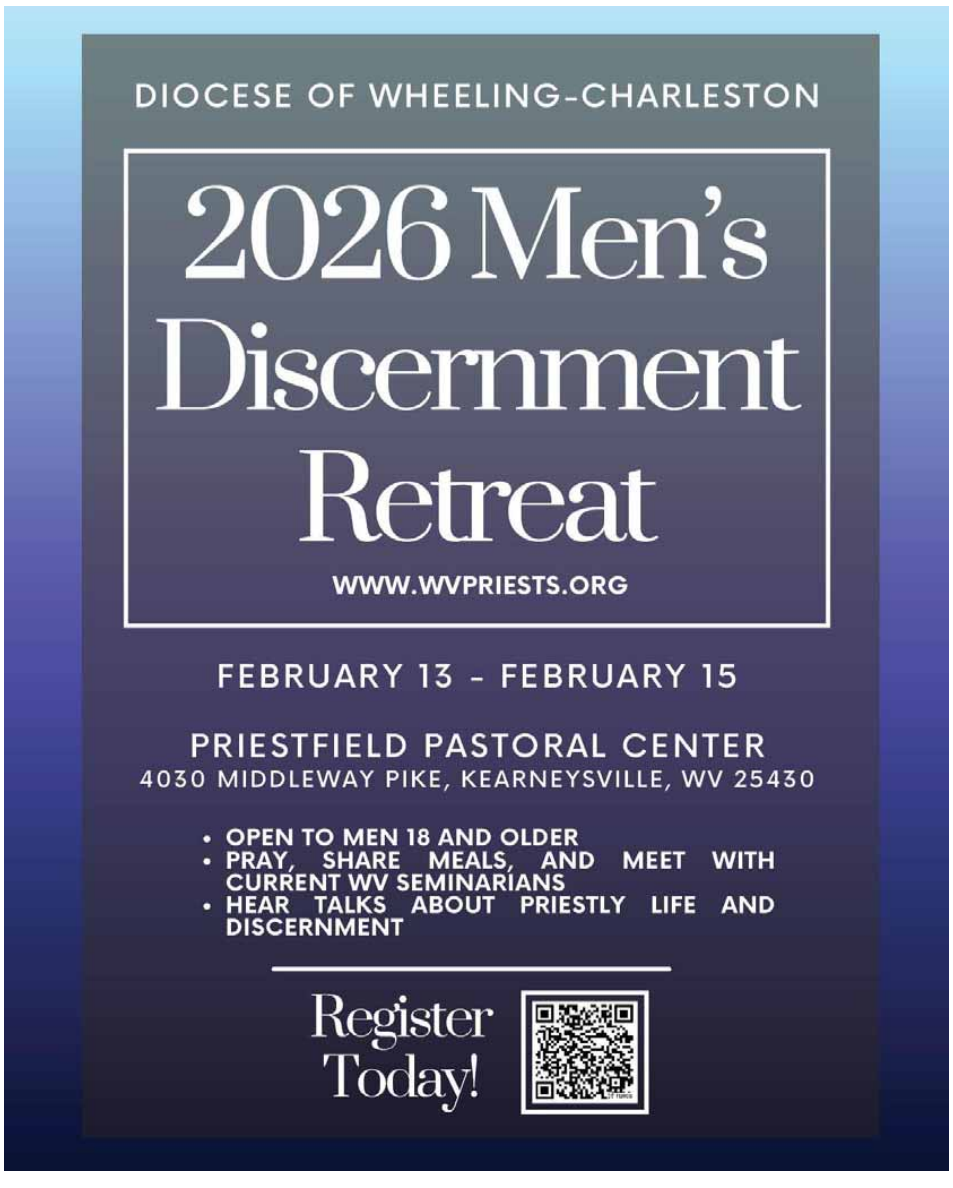
The Catholic Spirit's Print Schedule for 2026

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

2026 Print Dates:
Lent, February 20
The Annunciation of the Lord, March 13 (Solemnity, March 25)
Easter, April 10 (Easter Sunday, April 5)
Month of Mary, Mother of God, May 15
Month of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, June 12
Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, August 14
Triumph of the Cross, September 11
Month of the Rosary, October 9
Advent, November 20
Christmas, December 18



‘Many Challenges Remain’ in Making Abortion ‘Unthinkable,’ Says Chairman of the U.S. Bishops’ Committee on Pro-Life Activities

By Gina Christian

(OSV News) — As the nation’s Catholics are set to remember unborn children in prayer, a U.S. bishop is stressing that amid several positive developments in safeguarding human life, “many challenges remain” in making abortion “unthinkable.”

“Our united prayers, sacrifices and efforts to protect human life and heal the wounds inflicted by abortion remain as important as ever,” said Bishop Daniel E. Thomas of Toledo, Ohio, who serves as chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Pro-Life Activities.

Bishop Thomas shared his thoughts in a Jan. 13 statement released by the USCCB, ahead of a number of national and local pro-life initiatives held throughout the month.

Those include the annual Jan. 22 Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children, and the national March for Life, which will take place Jan. 23 in Washington.

The date of the annual day of prayer recalls that of the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decisions in Roe v. Wade and Doe v. Bolton, which legalized abortion. Those rulings were overturned by the Supreme Court’s 2022 decision in Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, which returned the issue of abortion from the federal to the state level.

Since 2013, the U.S. Catholic bishops have also invited the faithful to join in the “9 Days for Life” novena ahead of the day of prayer, with the goal of ending abortion. Novena prayers and reflections can be found at https://www.respectlife.org/9-days-signup.

In his statement, Bishop Thomas lamented that the “tragic” Roe v. Wade decision “led to the loss of over 65 million children and immeasurable harm to their parents and family members.”

The day of prayer is a time for “prayer, penance, and our personal recommitment to the cause of life,” he said.

Bishop Thomas pointed to “several pro-life victories” in the wake of the Dobbs ruling.

“Most recently, at the national level, Congress acted heroically last year in largely defunding Planned Parenthood of federal taxpayer dollars,” he said, while the current administration under President Donald Trump “has reversed several of its predecessor’s pro-abortion policies.”

Yet, he warned, “despite these successes, human life is still gravely threatened by legalized abortion as it continues to be aggressively promoted at the state and federal level.”

Among the “many challenges” to be met are “pro-abortion ballot initiatives” and “the increased use and availability of abortion pills.”

According to data from the Guttmacher Institute and the Society for Family Planning, both of which support legalized abortion, an estimated 1,126,970 abortions were performed in the U.S. in 2024, up from 1,060,880 in the previous year.

Guttmacher noted an increase in the number of clinician-provided abortions since 2020, despite the Dobbs decision. The institute also found that chemical abortion “accounts for the majority of abortions provided in most U.S states without total abortion bans,” representing “63% of all clinician-provided abortions in 2023.”

“Despite the Dobbs decision overturning the federal right to abortion in June 2022, Guttmacher data continue to show an increase in the number of clinician-provided abortions as compared to 2020,” says Isaac Maddow-Zimet, Guttmacher Institute data scientist and Monthly Abortion Provision Study project lead

Bishop Thomas also underscored “the need to protect the Hyde Amendment to keep taxpayer funded abortion out of national health care bills.”

The amendment, named for its congressional sponsor, Rep. Henry J. Hyde of Illinois, has since 1977 banned the use of federal funds for abortion with limited exceptions in the cases of rape, incest and pregnancies where the life of the mother is endangered.

Recently, Trump advised fellow Republicans they “have to be a little flexible on Hyde” in addressing health care costs to edge out Democrats in the upcoming midterm elections.

“We must continue to support pregnant and parenting mothers in need and offer spiritual and emotional help to all who have participated in abortion,” said Bishop Thomas.

“As our Holy Father Pope Leo XIV has said, ‘God’s mercy calls us to protect every life, especially those society overlooks — the child yet to be born and the elderly nearing their journey’s end — because each bears Christ’s face,’” the bishop noted.

In conclusion, Bishop Thomas said, “May we see the face of Christ in every single person, in every pregnant mother, and every child in the womb. Let us remain steadfast in our commitment to ensure that every human life may be protected in law and welcomed in love, and that abortion may be unthinkable.”

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

‘9 Days for Life’ to Unite Hundreds of Thousands in Prayer for the Protection of Life

Novena Beings Today, Jan. 16

WASHINGTON — Catholics nationwide are invited to pray “9 Days for Life,” an annual Respect Life novena starting Friday, January 16.

In the Catholic Church, a ‘novena’ consists of prayers over nine successive days, and this particular novena is an opportunity for prayer and penance in observance of the annual Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children on January 22.

All are invited to sign up! Participants may access the novena or subscribe to receive the daily prayers by email or text message in English at 9daysforlife.com or in Spanish at respectlife.org/9-dias-por-la-vida

Sponsored by the Committee on Pro-Life Activities of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the novena began in 2013 in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of Roe v. Wade—the Supreme Court decision that made abortion legal throughout the United States. While the Supreme Court’s 2022 decision in Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization returned the issue of abortion to the people’s elected representatives at federal and state levels, continuing efforts are needed to protect children and their mothers from the tragedy of abortion. This is the fourteenth year the novena is taking place. Since the novena began, it has reached hundreds of thousands of people in over one hundred countries spanning six continents.

The overarching intention of the novena is the end to abortion. Each daily prayer intention highlights a related topic and is accompanied by a reflection, educational information, and suggested daily actions. A resource kit is available, featuring the daily prayer intentions and reflections, in both English and Spanish. A press kit is also available.

Pope Warns Diplomats of Rising Global Violence and Erosion of Human Life

By Josephine Peterson, Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – Pope Leo XIV warned diplomats of rising global volatility, fractured communication and a growing disregard for human life in his annual speech to representatives to the Holy See.

Speaking to representatives of the 184 countries that have full diplomatic relations with the Vatican, the pope expressed concern over a "weak" global approach and action among countries on certain issues, saying that "war is back in vogue and a zeal for war is spreading."

Peace is being sought through weapons, threatening the rule of law and therefore the foundation of all peaceful civil coexistence, he said in the Jan. 9 speech at the Hall of Benedictions at the Vatican.

He expressed concern about religious freedom being curtailed around the world. Aid to the Church in Need, an international Catholic aid organization, released its "Religious Freedom in the World Report" last year, concluding that 64.7% of the world's population lives in countries with "serious or very serious violations of religious freedom."

He cited deadly attacks on Christian communities in Africa and the Middle East, while also warning of less visible discrimination in Europe and the Americas.

He briefly spoke about the importance of treating migrants with human dignity, an issue he has been vocal about for months, before focusing his final thoughts on the value of family and the unborn.

The pope said the Church strongly rejects "any practice that denies or exploits the origin of life and its development."

The pope reiterated the Church's stance on abortion, including a deep concern about projects aimed at financing cross-border mobility for the purpose of accessing the so-called "right to safe abortion."

"It also considers it deplorable that public resources are allocated to suppress life, rather than being invested to support mothers and families," he said.

He also spoke out against surrogacy.

"By transforming gestation into a negotiable service, this violates the dignity both of the child, who is reduced to a 'product,' and of the mother, exploiting her body and the generative process, and distorting the original relational calling of the family," he said.

In this speech and throughout the year, the pope has spoken out on ongoing international strife, including the war in Ukraine, the Israel-Gaza conflict and the U.S. military operation to capture Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

When looking at today's conflicts, he said, "we cannot ignore that the destruction of hospitals, energy infrastructure, homes and places essential to daily life constitutes a serious violation of international humanitarian law."

He pointed to the United Nations as a counterbalance to this trend, saying that it is the center of international cooperation that defends humanitarian rights and mediates conflict.

But, he said, one of the greatest current challenges to dialogue as a way to address conflicts is the loss of a shared understanding of language.

"Today, the meaning of words is ever more fluid and the concepts they represent are increasingly ambiguous," he said. "Language is no longer the preferred means by which human beings come to know and encounter one another."

He said that the "contortions of semantic ambiguity" are becoming "more and more a weapon with which to deceive or to strike and offend opponents." He suggested clearer, more direct language be used throughout the home, politics and the media to address these misunderstandings and to avoid conflict on a greater scale.

He went on to say that efforts to loosen or blur the meaning of words are often defended as protecting free expression, but in fact undermine it.

"It is painful to see how, especially in the West, the space for genuine freedom of expression is rapidly shrinking," he said. "At the same time, a new Orwellian-style language is developing which, in an attempt to be increasingly inclusive, ends up excluding those who do not conform to the ideologies that are fueling it."

When moral or linguistic boundaries are weakened, he said, it doesn't stop at speech, but rather it spills over into limits on basic human rights and an individual's ability to act according to their moral and religious beliefs.

"This may be the refusal of military service in the name of non-violence or the refusal on the part of doctors and health care professionals to engage in practices such as abortion or euthanasia," he said.

The pope said if a society forces moral uniformity, it risks sliding toward authoritarianism.

Pope Leo closed by saying that despite conflict found around the world, there is no shortage of signs for courage and pointed to St. Francis of Assisi.

"His life shines brightly, for it was inspired by the courage to live in truth," he said, "and the knowledge that a peaceful world is built starting with humble hearts turned toward the heavenly city."

Pope ...

Cont'd from Page 1

especially in those countries that are experiencing a dramatic decline in birth rates," he said life "is a priceless gift that develops within a committed relationship based on mutual self-giving and service."

"In light of this profound vision of life as a gift to be cherished, and of the family as its responsible guardian, we categorically reject any practice that denies or exploits the origin of life and its development," the pope firmly stated, calling abortion a practice that "cuts short a growing life and refuses to welcome the gift of life."

Delivering the address in English, he told the diplomats that the Holy See "considers it deplorable that public resources are allocated to suppress life, rather than being invested to support mothers and families. The primary objective must remain the protection of every unborn child and the effective and concrete support of every woman so that she is able to welcome life."

Many of the diplomats are from countries that facilitate abortion in their legal systems, such as France, which has enshrined abortion in its constitution.

Pope Leo also expressed "deep concern" about "projects aimed at financing cross-border mobility for the purpose of accessing the so-called 'right to safe abortion.'"

Strongly opposing surrogacy as well, he said that "by transforming gestation into a negotiable service, this violates the dignity both of the child, who is reduced to a 'product,' and of the mother, exploiting her body and the generative process, and distorting the original relational calling of the family."

"In light of these challenges, we firmly reiterate that the protection of the right to life constitutes the indispensable foundation of every other human right. A society is healthy and truly progresses only when it safeguards the sanctity of human life and works actively to promote it," Pope Leo said.

Protecting life means also rejecting euthanasia, the pope emphasized, calling assisted dying methods "deceptive forms of compassion."

"Similar considerations can be extended to the sick and to those who are elderly or isolated, who at times struggle to find a reason to continue living," he said. "Civil society and States also have a responsibility to respond concretely to situations of vulnerability, offering solutions to human suffering, such as palliative care, and promoting policies of authentic solidarity, rather than encouraging deceptive forms of compassion such as euthanasia."

The pope met the world's diplomats a day after he finished a day and a half consistory with cardinals, one that strengthened his relationship with the college, and set him off for his own agenda after following Pope Francis' calendar in the Jubilee Year.

(Paulina Guzik is international editor for OSV News.)

Center for Dominican Studies
2025–26 Events

Celebrations of Dominican Saints

ODU and The Center for Dominican Studies invite students, faculty, staff, and community members to join us for our annual three-part series of Dominican Saints lectures. Please mark your calendars.

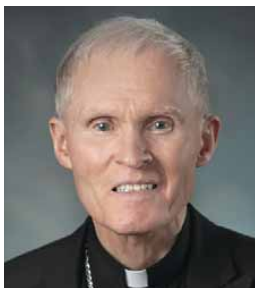
St. Albert the Great Lecture

Wednesday, Nov. 12, 2025 | 11 a.m.

Erskine Hall's Sr. Mary Andrew Matesich, OP Theatre

"Thinking Outside The Panel: How Solar Panel Orientation and Location Influence Power Production, The Local Environment and Economic Value"

Presented by Dr. Rydge Mulford



St. Thomas Aquinas Lecture

Wednesday, Jan. 28, 2026 | 11 a.m.

Erskine Hall's Sr. Mary Andrew Matesich, OP Theatre

"Today's Immigration: Friend or Foe?"

Presented by Bishop Mark Brennan

St. Catherine of Siena Lecture

Wednesday, April 29, 2026 | 3:30 p.m.

Sansbury Hall's Colonial Room

"We Each Have a Part to Play: Discerning Your Role in Promoting the Common Good"

Presented by Sr. Julia Walsh, FSPA

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Renovation Project Begins at St. Joseph Parish in Martinsburg

By Meg H. Partington

MARTINSBURG —The images embedded in the stained glass being installed at St. Joseph Parish in Martinsburg not only illustrate significant events and people in the life of Christ but allow the beauty of a church that no longer stands to inspire future generations.

The church at 225 S. Queen St. celebrated Epiphany on Jan. 3 and 4, its last Masses until late March in the sanctuary while a major renovation project takes place. The project, which will cost more than $600,000, includes replacing seven stained-glass windows, repainting the worship space and doing minor repairs to the pews.

In 2021, it was reported that the windows — installed in1969 — were leaking badly, said Deacon Patrick Michel, pastoral associate at St. Joseph Parish. Church leaders were told that the wooden frames around the windows were rotting, the polymer holding the glass together was deteriorating and that the structures would become dangerous within five years.

"We knew this was a project we couldn't kick down the road," said Brian Kaltenbaugh, director of music ministries for St. Joseph Parish and a member of the 12-member stained-glass window committee.

Coordinated by longtime St. Joseph parishioner Clarence E. Martin III, the committee started meeting in the spring of 2025 and gathered about every three weeks to discuss replacing some of the windows in the sanctuary. It was composed of men and women ranging in age from their 20s to 70s, Kaltenbaugh said.

Bids ranged from $125,000 to replace the windows with ones that were displayed in now-closed churches to $900,000 for new ones, Kaltenbaugh said. Some of the pricier options might only last 50 years, but reclaimed glass with aluminum channels mounted using modern techniques could last a century, so that was the route chosen, he said.

Selected for the project were Georgia-based King Richard's Liturgical Design & Contracting and Colorsmith Stained Glass Studio of Riverside, IL. They will restore the glass from St. Wendelin Church in South Pittsburgh, which closed in late 2023 and was demolished in June 2024. That parish was founded in 1873 and the building that was demolished was constructed in 1896, according to the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh. Deacon Michel said its traditional stained glass, designed by German craftsmen, is well suited for St. Joseph Parish, the cornerstone of which was laid in 1850 and which hosted its first Mass on Easter 1860.

Kaltenbaugh said new windows were installed in the Martinsburg church in 1969. The original glass was sold, but one bearing the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary was given back to the church and has been in storage ever since. That piece will be placed in the sacristy.

"It was almost a perfect fit," Kaltenbaugh said of the Mary window.

When considering what would replace the artistic glass in the sanctuary, Father Thomas Gallagher, pastor, wanted to return to a traditional look.

"I thought it might be a great nod to our past to have more historic-looking windows," Father Gallagher said. "We're looking to make it a beautiful space mindful of the historicity of the church."

He acknowledged the poignance of the scriptural quotes on the existing windows, including "My house shall be called a house of prayer" and "I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me," but said they could only inspire those who read English. The windows from St. Wendelin Church depict the wedding at Cana, Jesus in the temple, St. Anne with the Blessed Virgin Mary, the annunciation, the ascension, the Last Supper and Jesus presenting to St. Peter the keys to the kingdom. Father Gallagher said he hopes the wordless images communicate across all languages.

The Annunciation is depicted in this stained glass window at left from St. Wendelin Church, which once stood in South Pittsburgh. It is one of seven windows which will be installed at St. Joseph Parish in Martinsburg.

Photo courtesy of King Richard's Liturgical Design & Contracting

Using glass from another parish creates a sense of connection to the broader Church, Father Gallagher said.

"We cannot underestimate the power of beauty," Gallagher said. "The truth is good. The truth is beautiful. We want our worship space to be in line with what is true, good and beautiful."

Once the old glass is removed, any salvageable embedded images will be sold, as will blocks of glass, Kaltenbaugh said. Anything that is not usable or sold will be recycled, he said.

Before the multihued glass can be put in place, general contractor Worcester Eisenbrandt Inc., based in Baltimore, has to remove the present windows, repair the surrounding space, then put in new aluminum frames and storm windows, Deacon Michel said. Once the refurbished windows are installed, the sanctuary will be repainted by Brackens Painting LLC of Martinsburg. The color scheme for the walls represents the greens and browns often associated with St. Joseph, patron saint of the church, Father Gallagher said.

Deacon Michel said funds for the approximately $600,000 project were raised through donations, some of which reflected the value of portions of a window, while others were worth as much as the estimated $57,000 per-window cost.

To prepare for the significant undertaking, the church was closed Jan. 5 so decorations and items on the walls, such as the Stations of the Cross, could be removed. The pews were detached from the floor so they could be shifted to the middle of the church to make room for scaffolding around the windows.

The construction company started window demolition on Jan. 8.

On Jan. 10, weekend Masses started being held in the Saint Joseph School cafeteria and weekday Masses began being said at the chapel inside Mary's Refuge, a nearby maternity home. Baptisms will be done at the refuge, but weddings and funerals will be conducted at St. Leo Church in Inwood or Saint Bernadette Church in Hedgesville. Other liturgical events will be scheduled on a case-by-case basis.

Father Gallagher and Kaltenbaugh expressed gratitude for the guidance and support of leaders of the Diocese of

See "Project" on Page 7

Project ...

Cont'd from Page 6

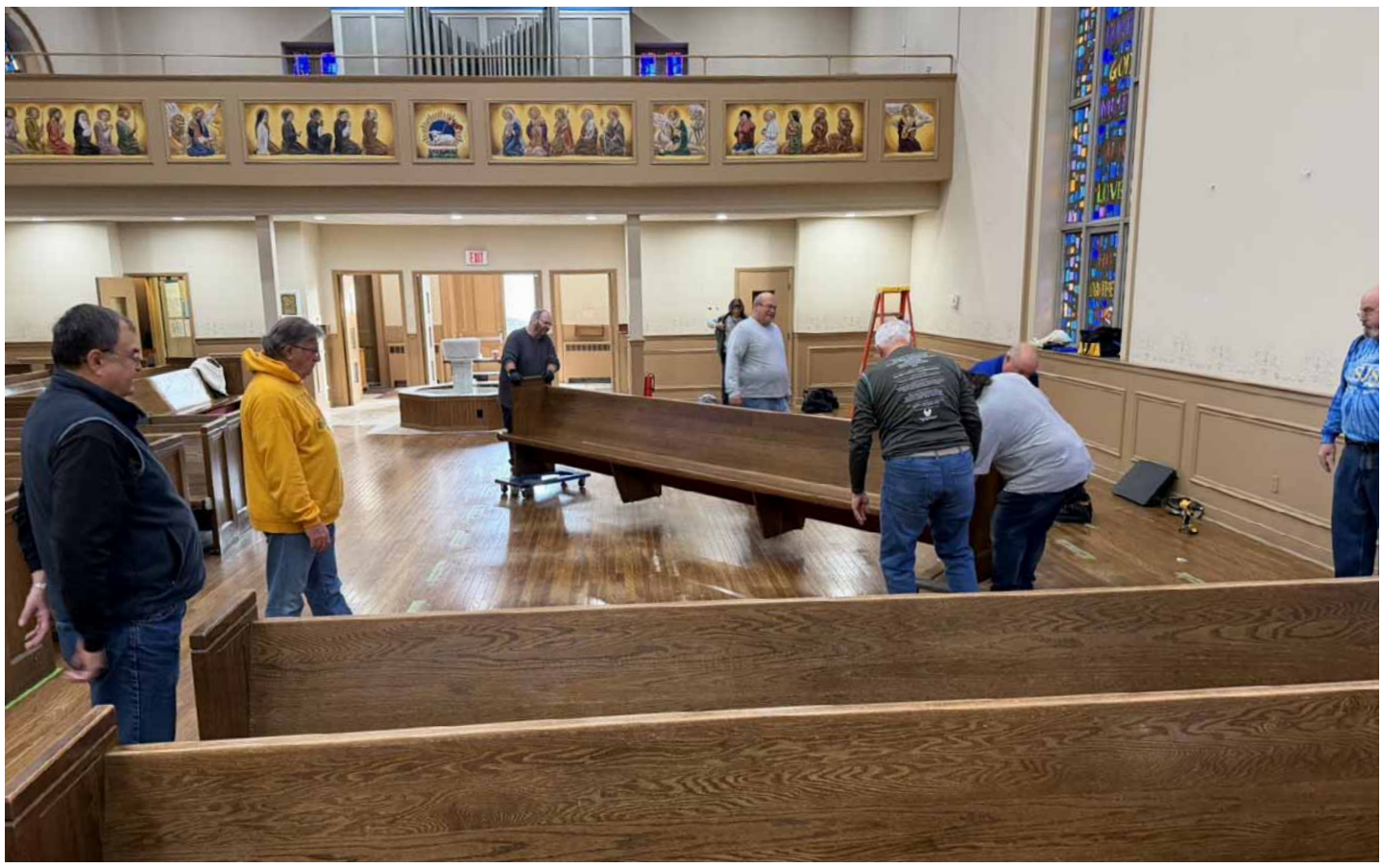
Wheeling-Charleston, including Bishop Mark Brennan and John Reardon, director of the Office of Buildings and Properties, and to school Principal Maria Byrd and Maintenance Supervisor Waylon McGee for coordinating the logistics of having weekend Masses in the school's cafeteria.

"I think this is a good opportunity for parishioners to visit their school," Byrd said. "We are honored to be the site for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and have made all necessary plans to accommodate this important recurring event for as long as it may be necessary."

Church leaders hope the renovation and painting will be done so Palm Sunday Masses can be celebrated in the sanctuary on the weekend of March 28.

"I'm just relying on the prayers of everyone involved so we can have our project completed on time," Father Gallagher said.

(Meg H. Partington is the administrative assistant at Saint Joseph School in Martinsburg.)



Brian Kaltenbaugh photo

Volunteers move pews to make room for scaffolding at St. Joseph Church in Martinsburg.

project rachel

Peace starts here

If you experience regret, guilt, or grief after abortion, be assured that God's healing love and mercy are always available to the repentant heart.

For confidential, non-judgmental help, call 888-456-HOPE (4673), or visit www.HopeAfterAbortion.org

Area Catholic Parishioners Invited to World Marriage Day Event at St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Wheeling

WHEELING — World Marriage Day will be celebrated at St. Vincent de Paul Church and Marist Centre in Wheeling on Saturday, Feb. 14. The event is open to members of St. Vincent de Paul's and other area Catholic parishes for an afternoon of celebrating your love for your spouse and thankfulness for the blessings received in the Sacrament of Marriage.

The program will begin at Mass with the congregation at 5 p.m. in the St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church on Marshall Avenue in Elm Grove. Following Mass, a wine/coffee/tea and cheese social for participating couples, and an opportunity to renew their marriage vows as a group, will precede a catered meal and a brief witness by a couple as to their experience in the Sacrament of Marriage. The evening will conclude with coffee and wedding cake. Couples unable to participate in the Mass can meet directly in the adjacent Marist Centre at 6 p.m. Special recognition will be made to the most recently married couple and the couple who has been married the longest. Couples are encouraged to bring and display their wedding pictures and albums for all to enjoy.

Reservations will be accepted until Feb. 6. The cost for the evening is $60 per couple. For reservations or additional information, please call Dennis or Brenda Beiter at (304) 238-4904, or John or Dorothy Dudzik at (304) 243-1104.

Courtesy photo

From left are the World Marriage Day Committee members at St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Wheeling: Dorothy Dudzik, Marilyn Delbrugge, John Dudzik, Susie Koval, Matt Koval, Susie Newmeyer, Paul Newmeyer, Brenda Beiter, and Denny Beiter.

National Marriage Week to be Celebrated Feb. 7-14

The observances of National Marriage Week and World Marriage Day (Feb. 8) are an opportunity to focus on building a culture of life and love that begins with supporting and promoting marriage and the family. The theme for this year is "Man and Woman He Created Them: Together with Purpose."

Below is a link to a National Marriage Week 2026 Parish Resource document that can be utilized.

https://www.usccb.org/resources/NMW_2026_Parish_Resource1.pdf

This resource shares things you can do as a parish, for couples, families, and selected resources and recommended websites.

U.S. Bishops Praise DHS Policy Change on Wait Times for Religious Worker Visas

By Kate Scanlon

WASHINGTON (OSV News) — The Department of Homeland Security said Jan. 14 it issued an interim final rule reducing wait times for religious worker visas. Catholic advocates were among those who pushed the Trump administration to address the backlog in their visa category.

In its announcement, the department said its regulation change would reduce the wait time applicants are required to remain outside the U.S.

A spokesperson for DHS said in a statement the department "is committed to protecting and preserving freedom and expression of religion."

"We are taking the necessary steps to ensure religious organizations can continue delivering the services that Americans depend on," the spokesperson said. "Pastors, priests, nuns, and rabbis are essential to the social and moral fabric of this country. We remain committed to finding ways to support and empower these organizations in their critical work."

The new rule removes the requirement for R-1 religious workers to reside outside the U.S. for a year upon reaching the visa's statutory five-year maximum period.

DHS said in its announcement that while R-1 religious workers will still have to leave the U.S., there is no longer a minimum time requirement for them to reside and be physically present outside the U.S. before reapplying for the R-1 visa.

Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Bishop Brendan J. Cahill of Victoria, Texas, chair of the USCCB's Committee on Migration, said in a joint statement, "We are tremendously grateful for the Administration's work to address certain challenges facing foreign-born religious workers, their employers, and the American communities they serve."

The DHS announcement came shortly after Archbishop Coakley met with President Donald Trump at the White House, although the topics of their Jan. 12 meeting have not been made public.

The USCCB is among the organizations that have worked to address the religious worker visa backlog. Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso, Texas, the migration committee's previous chair, told the bishops' fall plenary assembly in Baltimore in November that he was "very optimistic" there would be "positive developments in the very near future" on the issue of religious worker visas.

R-1 non-immigrant religious worker visas allow some religious workers outside the U.S. — such as Catholic priests and nuns — to legally enter the U.S. to serve their faith communities. These are initially granted for a 30-month period, with one possible renewal allowing for a total of 5 years, so they can be in the U.S. to carry out ministry work.

While within that window, they can apply for employment-based EB-4 status so they can legally remain in the U.S. without interruption. However, there is a significant backlog for such visas, as there is greater demand than the number of visas issued. That backlog could have a grave impact on the church in the U.S., as the National Study of Catholic Priests — released in 2022 by The Catholic University of America's Catholic Project — indicated 24% of priests serving in the U.S. are foreign-born, with many of them also subject to visa renewals.

The R-1 visa rule change, by eliminating the requirement to have residency outside the U.S. for one year before reapplying, is expected to help prevent these religious workers serving U.S. faith communities from having to be reassigned outside the U.S.

In their statement, Archbishop Coakley and Bishop Cahill added, "The value of the Religious Worker Visa Program and our appreciation for the efforts undertaken to support it cannot be overstated."

"This targeted change is a truly significant step that will help facilitate essential religious services for Catholics and other people of faith throughout the United States by minimizing disruptions to cherished ministries," they said. "In order to provide the full extent of the relief needed and truly promote the free exercise of religion in our country, we continue to urge Congress to enact the bipartisan Religious Workforce Protection Act."

That legislation, if enacted, would permit religious workers already in the U.S. on temporary R-1 status with pending EB-4 applications to stay in the U.S. while waiting for permanent residency. The bipartisan legislation was introduced in the Senate by Sens. Tim Kaine, D-Va., Susan Collins, R-Maine, and Jim Risch, R-Idaho, and in the House by Reps. Mike Carey, R-Ohio, and Richard Neal, D-Mass. In statements at the time, Kaine and Collins both cited priest shortages in their states. All five lawmakers behind the legislation are Catholic.

Miguel Naranjo, director of religious immigration services at the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, also known as CLINIC, said in comments to OSV News, "The Department of Homeland Security's decision to reduce the minimum time foreign-born religious workers must spend outside the country before re-applying for R1 status is a positive and pragmatic step — one that CLINIC, our partners and faith leaders across the country have advocated for."

"However, while today's DHS announcement offers welcome relief, religious workers are still required to depart the U.S. after five years, even though they may now return for a new R-1 period without waiting a full year abroad," Naranjo said.

"This change, while helpful," he added, "does not fully resolve the challenges facing clergy, particularly as travel bans continue to prevent many from obtaining visas at all. We hope this and future DHS decisions reflect a deeper recognition of the vital role foreign-born clergy and faith workers play in sustaining U.S. congregations, faith-based nonprofits and the communities in which they serve.

(Kate Scanlon is a national reporter for OSV News covering Washington.)

Supreme Court Hears Cases on Idaho, West Virginia Transgender Sports Bans

By Madalaine Elhabbal

The U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments Jan. 13 on whether to uphold state laws banning transgender athletes from competing on women's sports teams, and Catholic athletes outside the court said they hope justices keep the laws on the books.

Mary Pennefather, captain of the women's basketball team for Christendom College in Front Royal, Virginia, said: "If these court cases are allowed to happen, then say goodbye to all women's sports, because then all the transgender athletes will just come and play in the women's sports and get their national champion championships and NCAA titles from there."

Standing among her teammates outside the Supreme Court, Pennefather said: "I can work as hard as I can to be good at my sport, and a man can come in and work half as hard, and he will always be bigger, faster, and stronger than me. It totally goes against God's natural law. He made humans male and female. And now you have these people coming in here and saying, 'That's not right,' that men could be women and vice versa … it's totally disrupted and disordered, and it's a breakdown of the family."

The court heard more than three hours of arguments regarding two cases originating from Idaho and West Virginia in which lower courts upheld challenges by transgender athletes to statewide bans under the U.S. Constitution and federal anti-discrimination law. Supreme Court justices including Brett Kavanaugh, Samuel Alito, and Neil Gorsuch appeared to back the bans at several points during the oral arguments.

The challenges were brought by two transgender athletes: 15-year-old West Virginia high school student Becky Pepper-Jackson, and Boise State University student Lindsey Hecox of Idaho, who had attempted to withdraw the case but was ultimately denied.

Bishops weigh in

U.S. bishops submitted an amicus brief in support for the petitioners in Idaho v. Hecox and West Virginia v. B.P.J., stating that if Catholic schools were forced to allow transgender athletes in women's sports, they would need to halt all athletic programs or stop accepting funding "because allowing such competition would undermine fundamental Catholic teachings regarding the immutable, God-given differences between the sexes."

Idaho and West Virginia both have laws that ban transgender athletes from competing on sports teams at public schools and universities that do not correspond with their sex assigned at birth. There are 25 other states that have such laws.

"There are an awful lot of female athletes who are strongly opposed to participation by trans athletes in competitions with them," Alito said at one point during the oral arguments. He then asked whether girls who express these opinions should be regarded as "bigots." He added: "Are they deluded in thinking that they are subjected to unfair competition?" He also questioned whether transgender athletes hold an unfair advantage over biological women in sports at other points during the hearing.

Alito further insisted that a definition of sex is necessary in order to prove that transgender athletes are being discriminated against, stating: "How can a court determine whether there's discrimination on the basis of sex without knowing what sex means for equal protection purposes?" Alito posed this question in response to ACLU lawyers' position that a definition of sex is not legally necessary.

Kavanaugh emphasized the importance of Title IX and sex-based distinctions, stating: "One of the great successes in America over the last 50 years has been the growth of women and girls' sports. And it's inspiring."

He said allowing transgender people to compete in women's sports would "undermine or reverse that amazing success and create unfairness."

"For the individual girl who does not make the team or doesn't get on the stand for the medal or doesn't make all-league," he said, "there's a harm there, and I think we can't sweep that aside."

Gorsuch said "bottom line, sports are assigned by sex because sex is what matters in sports," adding that separation based on sex "is the fairest and the safest and the most administrable way to assign sports teams."

"It's been widely accepted for many decades because it's necessary for fair competition because, where sports are concerned, men and women are obviously not the same," he said during the hearing. "If Idaho can't enforce a sex-based line here in sports, where nobody disputes that biological differences matter, then no line based on biological sex can survive constitutional scrutiny."

"The court should uphold the Fairness in Women's Sports Act and reverse," he concluded.

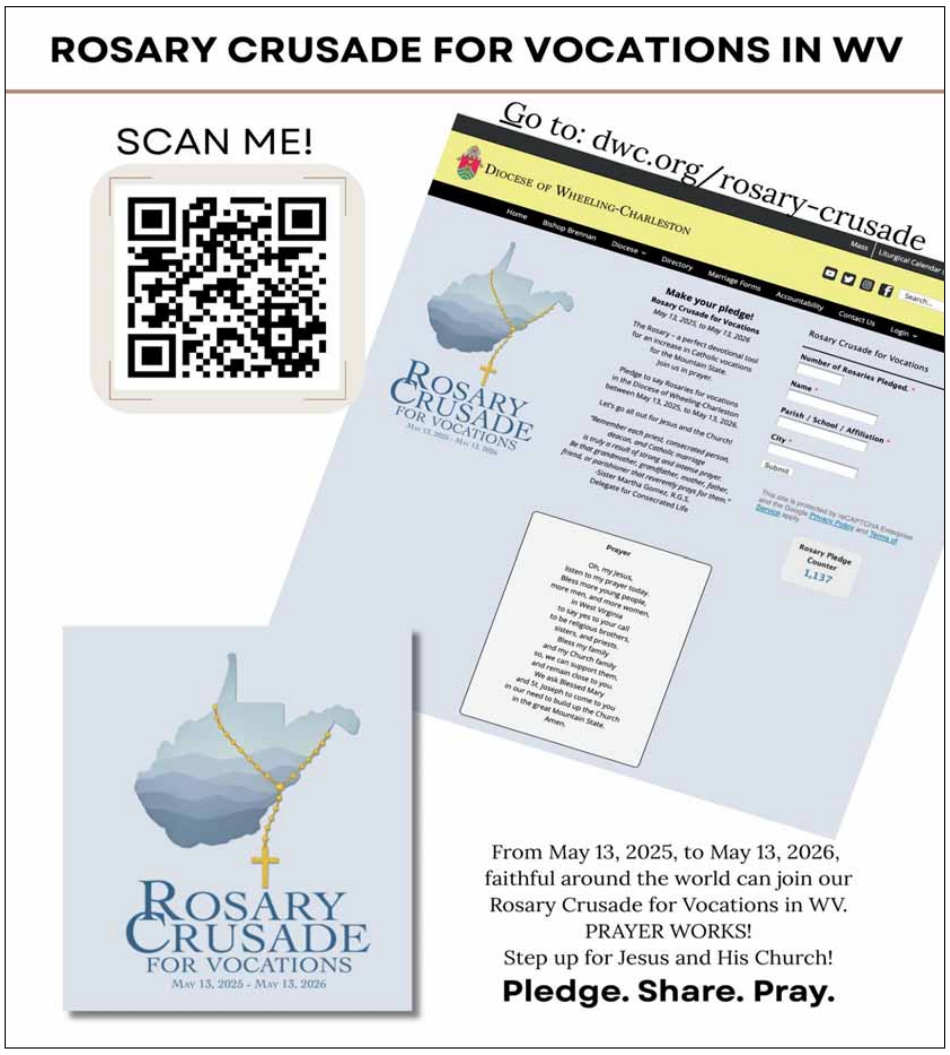
Outside the court, Matt Sharp, senior counsel with Alliance Defending Freedom, highlighted the importance of the court "protecting fairness in women's sports."

"If young women are made spectators in their own sports," Sharp said, "we know they're going to lose medals, they're going to lose scholarships, they're going to have their privacy violated."

Steve Ward, a board-certified internal medicine physician with Do No Harm, said: "I think this issue is representative of a much deeper concern that I have about the medical profession," he said. "We're here to support women's sports, and that's certainly important, but to my mind, we really have to think more carefully about what this means for the future of science and scientific research."

Ward emphasized the importance of scientific research based on "objective and fixed" reality. "All of these great great scientists of the past understood that, that the world could be studied because they had a Judeo-Christian worldview understanding that we live in a world that you can approach and you can make objective observations, perform the scientific method and so forth and reach some type of a conclusion that you can repeat and move forward with, develop technologies and all sorts of things," he said, adding: "If we discard all of that history in favor of psychological categories, then you really can no longer do science at all, and you have to throw that away."

(Madalaine Elhabbal is a staff reporter for Catholic News Agency, based at the Washington, D.C. headquarters of EWTN News.)



USCCB President Exhorts Faithful to Heed MLK's Call to be 'A Drum Major for Justice'

WASHINGTON (OSV News) — Marking the Jan. 19 Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the U.S. bishops' conference, urged Catholics to reflect on how they are called to be "drum majors for justice" in their own communities. He drew on the slain Civil Rights leader's words and the Church's Gospel mission from Jesus Christ in a Jan. 13 statement released by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Archbishop Coakley reflected on the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1968 sermon, "The Drum Major Instinct," and challenged the faithful to consider how leadership rooted in service and humility can shape efforts for justice, peace and righteousness today.

"Let us take a moment to honor the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose prophetic voice was a 'drum major for justice,'" Archbishop Coakley said, referring to Rev. King by a widely-used title reflecting his doctorate in systematic theology earned from Boston University. Rev. King also received several honorary doctorates from colleges and universities that held his Civil Rights leadership in high esteem until his death at just 39 years old. He had led the Civil Rights movement from 1955 until 1968, when a white supremacist assassinated him in Memphis, Tennessee.

In reflecting on how Rev. King's "inspiring words continue to speak to our hearts today," Archbishop Coakley quoted the Civil Rights leader's own description of the legacy he hoped to leave behind.

"Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice," Rev. King said in the sermon. "Say that I was a drum major for peace. I was a drum major for righteousness. And all of the other shallow things will not matter."

Archbishop Coakley emphasized that Rev. King's message remains relevant for Catholics seeking to live out the Gospel in concrete ways.

"Dr. King's sermon encouraged people to be leaders in the priorities that Christ gave us," he said.

He posed a central question for the faithful: "What does it mean to be 'a drum major' in our own communities?"

Answering that question, the archbishop pointed to Jesus Christ's demands in the Gospel of Matthew, writing that the priorities Christ gave his followers are directed in the corporal works of mercy: "to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit those in prison."

Archbishop Coakley said the Catholic Church also seeks to fulfill this mandate through ministries and charitable works across the country. But he emphasized that the call extends to every follower of Christ.

"Just as important is the challenge to help the faithful to authentically live out this call," he said.

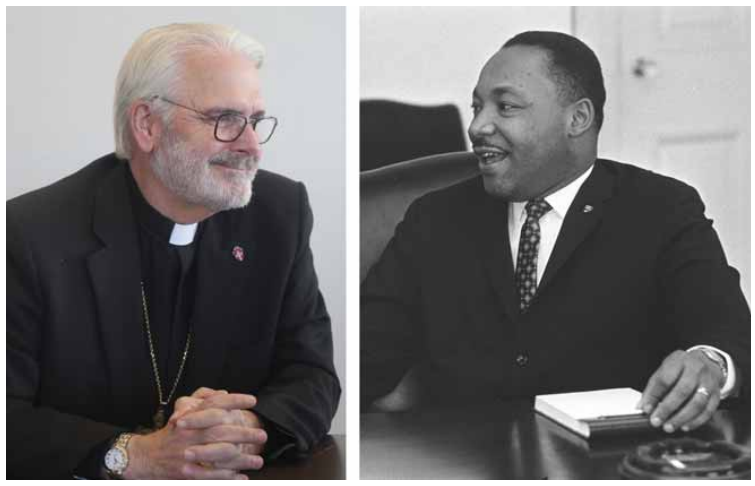
He cited recent efforts by the U.S. bishops as examples of striving to lead with love, noting the Nov. 2025 special message on immigration and its continued commitment to "addressing the sin of racism."

He said both efforts are "two recent examples that serve as efforts to be drum majors of love in our communities."

Referencing the bishops' Nov. 2018 pastoral letter on racism, "Open Wide Our Hearts," he highlighted the enduring influence of Rev. King's leadership in confronting racial injustice and fostering unity grounded in faith.

"As we remember Dr. King and commemorate his legacy, let us continue this work as drum majors and engage in actions of compassion and mercy," the USCCB president said.

Archbishop Coakley concluded by inviting Catholics to prayerful discernment and action.



OSV News photo/Bob roller/LBJ Library

Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., are pictured in a combination photo. Marking Martin Luther King Jr. Day Jan. 19, Archbishop Coakley urged Catholics to reflect on how they are called to be "drum majors for justice" in their own communities, drawing on the Civil Rights leader's words and the Church's Gospel mission in a Jan. 13 statement released by the USCCB.

"I encourage you to take time to reflect on how the Holy Spirit may be inviting you to join with others in addressing challenges within our families, neighborhoods, or communities," he said. "May we lead the way in building a society rooted in justice, peace, righteousness, and the dignity of every human person."

Martin Luther King Jr. Day is observed on the third Monday of the month of January, near his Jan. 15 birthday. This year also marks the 40th anniversary of its first observance as a national holiday beginning Jan. 20, 1986.

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Venezuelan Nobel Laureate Machado Asks Pope for Help in Freeing Political Prisoners

By Junno Arocho Esteves, OSV News

(OSV News) — Venezuelan opposition leader and Nobel laureate María Corina Machado asked for Pope Leo XIV's help in securing the release of political prisoners in the country following the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

The Vatican announced the meeting Jan. 12, which took place in the library of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, but gave no details.

However, in a statement published on X by the Venezuelan political opposition coalition, Comando con Venezuela, Machado said she sought the pope's help in seeking the release of more than 1,000 political prisoners "and for an immediate transition to democracy."

"Today, I had the blessing and honor of being able to share with His Holiness and express our gratitude for his monitoring of events in our country," Machado said. "I also conveyed to him the strength of the Venezuelan people, who remain firm and in prayer for Venezuela's freedom, and I asked him to intercede for all Venezuelans who remain kidnapped and missing."

According to the statement, the opposition leader reiterated to the pope that the will of the Venezuelan people was seen in their electing Edmundo González, whose victory in the 2024 election was overturned by the Venezuelan election authority, which was loyal to Maduro.

"Machado highlighted the spiritual struggle Venezuelans have faced for years and said that finally, with the accompaniment of the Church and unprecedented pressure from the U.S. government, the 'defeat of evil' in the country is drawing near," the statement read.

Comando con Venezuela said that Machado also met Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, after her meeting with the pope.

The pope's meeting with the opposition leader comes just over a week after Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, were captured Jan. 3 in a U.S. military operation ordered by President Donald Trump.

Maduro and his wife were transported to New York, where they are currently facing narco-terrorism conspiracy charges.

After Maduro's capture, Pope Leo expressed concerns over the United States' increasing military presence in the Caribbean, and called for "the common good of the peoples" to be placed above "partisan interests."

"In this regard, I renew my appeal to respect the will of the Venezuelan people, and to safeguard the human and civil rights of all, ensuring a future of stability and concord," the pope said Jan. 9 during a meeting with members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Vatican.

At a Jan. 8 briefing at the Vatican press office, Colombian Cardinal Luis José Rueda Aparicio of Bogota told journalists the situation in Venezuela was on the mind of the cardinals attending the extraordinary consistory Jan. 7-8.

"We carry it in our hearts; we suffer through it; it pains us all," he said.

Cardinal Rueda said the pope had also shown great concern for Venezuela and has made "a consistent effort to invite parties toward the paths of dialogue and consensus. He is calling for peace; he is calling to truly build peace."

"He wants nations to come together with respect for human rights, sovereignty and the self-determination of their own people to find answers to the problems currently being experienced," the cardinal added.

CNS photo/Vatican Media

Pope Leo XIV meets María Corina Machado, Venezuelan opposition leader and 2025 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, during a private audience at the Vatican Jan. 12.

While some believed Machado, a former member of Venezuela's national assembly, would receive U.S. support to govern the ailing country after Maduro's capture, Trump said she lacked support in Venezuela and instead backed Delcy Rodriguez, Maduro's vice president, as acting president.

According to Reuters, the White House criticized the Nobel Committee's choice of Machado over Trump, who has publicly coveted the award.

Machado, who dedicated the award to Trump and the people of Venezuela, offered to give her award to Trump in gratitude for Maduro's capture. However, in a rare statement, the Norwegian Nobel Institute announced that the Nobel Prize could not be shared or transferred to another person, Reuters reported.

In an interview with Fox News, Trump said he would be meeting with Machado in the coming days, according to Reuters.

(Junno Arocho Esteves is an international correspondent for OSV News.)

Florida Venezuelans React with Hope Amid Fast-Moving Developments Back Home

By Tom Tracy / Florida Catholic, OSV News

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (OSV News) — Years from now a question likely to still circulate among the Venezuelan diaspora in Florida will be: Where were you when you first learned of the apprehension and arrest of Venezuela's swaggering dictator?

It's a moment many displaced Venezuelans in the U.S. and other countries in the Western Hemisphere have been dreaming about for years, and it arrived in the early morning of Jan. 3, beginning about 2 a.m. local time.

President Donald Trump was in his home in Palm Beach that weekend when he gave the green light to a military raid that snatched the Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife from their Caracas residence and deposited them both in a New York City jail cell. The two have pleaded not guilty to various charges stemming from drug trafficking, terrorism and corruption.

In Miami, newly ordained Deacon Gustavo Adolfo Roversi and his family were together that first weekend of January when they heard the news.

A native of Valencia, Venezuela, Deacon Roversi went to college at the University of Kansas in the 1980s before returning to South America to help run the family paper products manufacturing business. They later expanded the business to Florida in the late 1990s when they saw the social revolution being rolled out under Hugo Chavez in part owing to popular dissatisfaction with political corruption in those years.

"It turned out to be a good decision because when Chavez took over the whole country started to decline and decline," Deacon Roversi told

See "Pope" on Page 13

OSV News photo/Marco Bello, Reuters

People hold Venezuelan flags on the streets of Miami Jan. 3 as they react to the news after U.S. President Donald Trump said the U.S. has struck Venezuela and captured its President Nicolas Maduro.

Pope ...

Cont'd from Page 12

OSV News.

Chavez was president of Venezuela, serving from 1999 until his death in 2013, which is when Maduro came to power.

"I always went back home at least four or five times a year," the permanent deacon said, "but it went from bad to worse year after year — you could see it in the inflation — what I used to pay for my monthly apartment mortgage in the 1980s could not even buy one cup of coffee for that same amount years later. I think it was the highest inflation rate ever recorded on Earth."

Deacon Roversi said that while he can't speak for the entire South Florida Venezuelan community, most seem elated at the turn of events, he said, and hopeful for a better future.

He added that he has "personal friends who were thrown into jail, who were tortured, who saw their businesses torn apart, and those things do happen."

The electorate in Venezuela now must also be ready to learn some lessons of the past about political corruption on the one hand and the false promises of socialism on the other.

"We still have family and friends there and we have been touched by this regime in several ways and we feel there is confidence right now that things are going to be better. The whole latin american and Venezuelans in particular are pro U.S.," he said. "What comes next depends on what we have learned from our mistakes."

The ongoing emigration of millions of Venezuelans from their native country is the largest recorded refugee crisis in the Americas. According to The Associated Press, about 8 million people have fled the country since 2014.

The Miami suburb of Doral, population about 80,000, has been nicknamed "Little Venezuela," or "Doralzuela," because of its large Venezuelan population, and many prayed at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church for the future of their native country during Mass Jan. 4.

According to news reports, their Venezuelan-born pastor, Father Israel Mago, told worshippers to pray for "a fair and peaceful transition in Venezuela, so peace and justice can reign."

Mariela Castillo is an Orlando resident who fled Venezuela with her family in 2014 when the economic and social collapse there made it too difficult to acquire needed diabetes medications.

"I was in bed at 1:30 a.m. when my mom in Jupiter, Florida, called me," she told OSV News. "I thought something was wrong at first because she was crying and screaming that Maduro was no longer in Venezuela."

"We were living in the heart of the port city of Maricaobo and saw a lot of disasters happening as the army took to the streets and closed avenues, closed universities, there was no food," Castillo recalled. "My mother decided to come to the USA because we had family in Jupiter, Florida, and they invited us to come and see if we like it."

"The transition to coming here was a little rough," she said. "Obviously we were leaving behind Venezuela in the worst moments; it was pretty bad."

Arriving with no English comprehension, the now-married young adult said she slowly learned English by working in Florida restaurants until she married and went to work assisting her husband in his business in central Florida.

Castillo said she and her family support the United States' audacious if not controversial capture of Maduro, but that it is hard to know how all the events will unfold in the coming months and years.

The remaining government in power, headed by Maduro's Vice President Delcy Rodriguez, who was sworn in as the country's interim president Jan. 5, has declared a state of emergency banning any celebration of the U.S. military operation. Meanwhile, the media reports that roving gangs of pro-Maduro thugs are intimidating citizens amid a tense repression of the local press.

"It is hard to understand all these (developments), but for us this a plus, while others are wondering about the oil, or what President Donald Trump will be doing. What we are celebrating is being free of having a president who didn't know how to run a country, coming from (Venezuelan President Hugo) Chavez to something worse — Chavez was at least a little bit smarter," Castillo said.

"We have that hope that it will get better but it will take time and obviously nothing will be perfect right now," she added.

In Fort Myers, Luis Aparcedo, a businessman who came to the U.S. with his family when he was 10 years old, said he is "still in shock to be honest," regarding the U.S. strike on Venezuela and removal of Maduro. Aparcedo has not traveled to Venezuela since 2014.

"We were all waiting for this to happen but had doubts, and thoughts that (regime change) was all talk — and then it happened," he told OS News. "It is good news for us; I am happy. I know the regime and persecution is still going on but this is a huge step forward."

Aparcedo said virtually everyone he knows from the Venezuelan community is celebrating, but the majority also remain confused and anxious about what is going to happen now and what the transition will look like.

Meanwhile, Aparcedo said he is patiently waiting for a time when he feels safe enough to visit Venezuela — possibly in six months, maybe a year or even more.

"I am no expert but the new interim president will probably try to wait it out until Trump leaves office. The smart thing right now might be a soft transition, a slow transition until they work everything out," he said.

"And I think the U.S. will negotiate with them. The U.S. is stopping the oil going to Cuba, Russia, China so that will also be beneficial for the U.S. and for Western Hemisphere. We are all waiting for a time again to at least visit. It has been scary with these people — you don't know if they will arrest you for whatever reason. I want to go there (Venezuela) so bad."

(Tom Tracy writes for OSV News from Florida.)

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Trump Meets With U.S. Bishops' President at White House

By Kate Scanlon

WASHINGTON (OSV News) — President Donald Trump met with Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Jan. 12, a spokesperson for the USCCB confirmed.

The private meeting, which was listed on the official White House schedule for Trump, was closed to press. The White House did not specify the topic of the meeting.

In a statement provided to OSV News, a USCCB spokesperson said, "Archbishop Coakley had the opportunity for introductory meetings with President Trump, Vice President Vance, and other Administration officials, in which they discussed areas of mutual concern, as well as areas for further dialogue."

"Archbishop Coakley is grateful for the engagement and looks forward to ongoing discussions," the statement said.

Although it was not immediately clear what the topic of the meeting was, it comes as the U.S. bishops have alternately praised and criticized some Trump administration policies, objecting to some of his actions on topics including immigration and the death penalty, but commending others, such as those on gender policy.

Archbishop Coakley was elected president of the USCCB in November at the bishops' fall plenary assembly. At the same meeting, the bishops also approved a "special pastoral message" Nov. 12 — their first since 2013 when they objected to the Obama administration's contraceptive mandate — voicing "our concern here for immigrants." The bishops' special message opposed "the indiscriminate mass deportation of people" and also prayed "for an end to dehumanizing rhetoric and violence, whether directed at immigrants or at law enforcement."

The statement, which did not name Trump, came as a growing number of bishops have acknowledged that some of the Trump administration's immigration policies risk presenting the church with both practical challenges in administering pastoral support and charitable endeavors, as well as religious liberty challenges.

The week before Trump's meeting with Archbishop Coakley, the U.S. president told House Republicans to be "flexible" on the Hyde Amendment, which prohibits public funding of elective abortions, in negotiations on health care subsidies. That policy has long been supported by the U.S. bishops, who defended it after Trump's comments.

Private meetings between a sitting president of the USCCB and the president of the United States are not without precedent, but do not always happen.

The previous president of the USCCB, Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services, told OSV News in November, "I was never able to meet with the president of the United States. Neither with President (Joe) Biden nor with President Trump."

Trump had a brief meeting in 2017 that included Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, who was president of the conference at the time.

USCCB presidents, including then-Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, Kentucky, and Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York, had several meetings between the two of them with then-President Barack Obama over the course of his presidency.

(Kate Scanlon is a national reporter for OSV News covering Washington.)

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‘Persisten muchos desafíos’ para que el aborto sea ‘impensable’, afirma un obispo de EEUU

Por Gina Christian

(OSV News) — Mientras los católicos del país se preparan para recordar a los niños no nacidos en sus oraciones, un obispo estadounidense destaca que, a pesar de los avances positivos en la protección de la vida humana, "persisten muchos desafíos" para que el aborto sea "impensable".

"Nuestras oraciones, sacrificios y esfuerzos conjuntos para proteger la vida humana y sanar las heridas infligidas por el aborto siguen siendo tan importantes como siempre", afirmó el obispo Daniel E. Thomas, de Toledo, Ohio, que ocupa el cargo de presidente del Comité de Actividades Pro-Vida de la Conferencia de Obispos Católicos de Estados Unidos.

El obispo Thomas compartió sus reflexiones en una declaración publicada el 13 de enero por la USCCB, antes de una serie de iniciativas nacionales y locales en favor de la vida que se llevarán a cabo a lo largo del mes.

Entre ellas se encuentran el Día de Oración por la Protección Legal de los Niños en el Vientre Materno, que se celebra anualmente el 22 de enero, y la Marcha Nacional por la Vida, que tendrá lugar el 23 de enero en Washington.

La fecha del día anual de oración recuerda la de las sentencias de la Corte Suprema de Estados Unidos de 1973 en los casos Roe vs. Wade y Doe vs. Bolton, que legalizaron el aborto. Esas sentencias fueron anuladas por la decisión de la Corte Suprema de 2022 en el caso Dobbs vs. Jackson Women's Health Organization, que devolvió la cuestión del aborto del ámbito federal al estatal.

Desde 2013, los obispos católicos de Estados Unidos también invitan a los fieles a unirse a la novena "9 días por la vida" ("9 Days for Life") antes del día de oración, con el objetivo de poner fin al aborto. Las oraciones y reflexiones de la novena se pueden encontrar en https://es.respectlife.org/9-dias-por-la-vida (y en inglés: https://www.respectlife.org/9-days-signup.)

En su declaración, el obispo Thomas lamentó que la "trágica" decisión Roe vs. Wade "provocara la pérdida de más de 65 millones de niños y un daño inconmensurable a sus padres y familiares".

El día de oración es un momento para "la oración, la penitencia y nuestro compromiso personal con la causa de la vida", afirmó.

El obispo Thomas señaló "varias victorias provida" a raíz de la sentencia Dobbs.

"Más recientemente, a nivel nacional, el Congreso actuó heroicamente el año pasado al retirar en gran medida la financiación federal a Planned Parenthood", dijo, mientras que la actual administración del presidente Donald Trump "ha revertido varias de las políticas proaborto de su predecesor".

Sin embargo, advirtió, "a pesar de estos éxitos, la vida humana sigue estando gravemente amenazada por el aborto legalizado, ya que se sigue promoviendo agresivamente a nivel estatal y federal".

Entre los "muchos retos" que hay que afrontar se encuentran las "iniciativas electorales a favor del aborto" y "el aumento del uso y la disponibilidad de las píldoras abortivas".

Según datos del Instituto Guttmacher y la Sociedad para la Planificación Familiar, ambos partidarios del aborto legalizado, se estima que en 2024 se practicaron 1.126.970 abortos en Estados Unidos, frente a los 1.060.880 del año anterior.

Guttmacher señaló un aumento en el número de abortos practicados por un profesional de la salud desde 2020, a pesar de la decisión Dobbs. El instituto también descubrió que el aborto químico "representa la mayoría de los abortos practicados en la mayoría de los estados de Estados Unidos sin prohibición total del aborto", lo que supone "el 63% de todos los abortos practicados por médicos en 2023".

"A pesar de la decisión Dobbs que anuló el derecho federal al aborto en junio de 2022, los datos de Guttmacher siguen mostrando un aumento en el número de abortos practicados por médicos en comparación con 2020", afirma Isaac Maddow-Zimet, científico de datos del Instituto Guttmacher y director del proyecto Monthly Abortion Provision Study (Estudio mensual sobre la práctica del aborto).

El obispo Thomas también subrayó "la necesidad de proteger la Enmienda Hyde para mantener el aborto financiado por los contribuyentes fuera de las facturas nacionales sobre el cuidado de salud".

La enmienda, que lleva el nombre de su patrocinador en el Congreso, el congresista Henry J. Hyde, de Illinois, prohíbe desde 1977 el uso de fondos federales para el aborto, con excepciones limitadas en casos de violación, incesto y embarazos en los que la vida de la madre corre peligro.

Recientemente, Trump aconsejó a sus compañeros republicanos que tenían "que ser un poco flexibles con Hyde" a la hora de abordar los costos de la atención médica para superar a los demócratas en las próximas elecciones de mitad de mandato.

"Debemos seguir apoyando a las madres embarazadas y con hijos que lo necesitan y ofrecer ayuda espiritual y emocional a todas las personas que han participado en un aborto", afirmó el obispo Thomas.

"Como ha dicho nuestro Santo Padre, el Papa León XIV, ‘la misericordia de Dios nos llama a proteger todas las vidas, especialmente las que la sociedad pasa por alto: los niños que aún no han nacido y los ancianos que se acercan al final de su travesía, porque cada uno de ellos lleva el rostro de Cristo’", señaló el obispo.

Para concluir, el obispo Thomas dijo: "Que podamos ver el rostro de Cristo en cada persona, en cada madre embarazada y en cada niño en el vientre materno. Mantengámonos firmes en nuestro compromiso de garantizar que toda vida humana sea protegida por la ley y acogida con amor, y que el aborto sea impensable".

(Gina Christian es reportera multimedia de OSV News.)

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