

THE CATHOLIC

# Spirit

## Holy Year Pilgrimage is Chance to Begin Again, Pope Says

By Cindy Wooden, Catholic News Service

**VATICAN CITY (CNS)** — A holy year is an opportunity to start fresh with one's relationship with God and with other people, Pope Francis told thousands of pilgrims.

The Holy Year 2025 theme, "Pilgrims of Hope," is a reminder that hope "is not a habit or a character trait — that you either have or you don't — but a strength to be asked for. That is why we make ourselves pilgrims: We come to ask for a gift, to start again on life's journey," the pope said Jan. 11.

Meeting more than 7,000 pilgrims who filled the Vatican audience hall or pressed against crowd-control barriers outside, Pope Francis began a series of Saturday general audiences designed, as he said, to "welcome and embrace all those who are coming from all over the world in search of a new beginning."

Throughout the audience, the pope had the crowd repeat "ricominciare," Italian for "begin again."

The audience was held the day before the feast of the Baptism of the Lord when the church commemorates Jesus going down to the Jordan River and joining the crowds who responded to St. John the Baptist's call for conversion.

A summary of the pope's talk, read to the pilgrims in English, said that John the Baptist's "message in calling for conversion was one of hope in the advent of the Messiah, a hope fulfilled in the coming of Jesus and his invitation to welcome the kingdom of God."

"Like the crowds that flocked to the waters of the Jordan, may all who pass through the Holy Door this year receive the grace of interior renewal,

**See "Holy Year" on Page 2**



## Bishop Brennan to Celebrate Mass of Christian Burial for Father Ledford

Bishop Mark Brennan will be the presider and homilist for the Mass of Christian Burial for Very Rev. John Selwin Ledford, V.F., today, Friday, Jan. 17, at noon at the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Wheeling. Visitation will be prior to the Mass from 9-11:45 a.m. A luncheon in the Great Hall of Wheeling Central Catholic High School is open to all following the Mass. Father Ledford died Jan. 10 at the age of 77 in Glen Dale. See his obituary on Page 3. Shown above is a memorial at St. Jude Parish in Glen Dale, where he was pastor for the last six years. *Joyce Bibey photo*

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# ‘9 Days for Life’ Unites Hundreds of Thousands in Prayer for the Protection of Life

**WASHINGTON** — Catholics nationwide are invited to pray “9 Days for Life,” an annual Respect Life novena starting Thursday, Jan. 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 Jan. 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](http://9daysforlife.com) or in Spanish at [respectlife.org/9-dias-por-la-vida](http://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. Jack-*

son 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 thirteenth 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, among other materials that are available in both English and Spanish. A press kit is also available.

For additional information and updates throughout the novena, please visit the USCCB’s social media pages on X, Facebook, Threads, and Instagram.

**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](http://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](http://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](http://www.dwc.org), under “Accountability.” Complaint forms are available online at [www.dwc.org](http://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](http://www.dwc.org), under “Accountability”, then “Report Misconduct” or by calling 844.723.8381. EthicsPoint is a third-party reporting system that reports to civil authorities where applicable and Diocesan authorities, and the identity of the person reporting is protected. Links and information: WV Department of Health and Human Resources: <https://www.wvdhhr.org/report.asp>. West Virginia State Police, Crimes Against Children Unit: 304-293-6400.

## Sexual Abuse Awareness Training

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops requires all Dioceses/Eparchies have a Safe Environment Program for the protection of children and young people. 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](http://www.dwc.org), click “Diocese”, then “Offices,” then “Office of Safe Environment.”



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## Diocesan Official Appointment

Bishop Mark E. Brennan has made public the following appointment:

**Father Rusiri Kokila Wijewickrama, TOR**, is appointed parochial vicar of St. Francis de Sales Parish in Beckley, with residence at the parish rectory, effective January 13, 2025.

## Holy Year...

Cont’d from Page 1

openness to the dawn of God’s kingdom and its summons to conversion, fraternal love and concern for the least of our brothers and sisters,” the pope’s message to English-speakers said.

On a Holy Year pilgrimage and, more generally, on the journey of life, “we, too, bring many questions,” the pope told the pilgrims, but Jesus replies by pointing to a “new path, the path of the Beatitudes,” which proclaims how blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who struggle for justice and those who work for peace.

“Hope for our common home — this Earth of ours, so abused and wounded — and the hope for all human beings resides in the difference of God. His greatness is different,” the pope said. Jesus demonstrated how greatness comes not from domination, but from learning “to serve, to love fraternally, to acknowledge ourselves as small. And to see the least, to listen to them and to be their voice.”

## The Catholic Spirit’s Print Schedule for 2025

There are 10 print editions in 2025. 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](http://thecatholicspiritwv.org).

### 2025 Print Issues and Dates:

Month of the Holy Family, February 7; Lent, March 7; Easter, April 18; Month of Mary, Mother of God, May 23; Month of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, June 13; Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, August 15; Triumph of the Cross, September 12; Month of the Rosary, October 3; Advent, November 21; Christmas, December 19

# Obituary—Very Rev. John Selwin Ledford, V.F.

Very Rev. John Selwin Ledford, V.F., 77, died Jan. 10, 2025, in Glen Dale.

He was born August 4, 1947, in Lewisburg, Tenn., the son of the late Katherine T. (Orr) and Selwin Ledford.

He is a 1969 graduate of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where he received a Bachelor of Science in agriculture; and a 1977 graduate of Franciscan University of Steubenville, where he received a Bachelor of Science in accounting.

He attended Mount St. Mary's College and Seminary in Emmitsburg, Md., graduating in 1975, and was ordained to the priesthood on April 19, 1975, by Most Rev. Joseph H. Hodges at the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Wheeling.

Father Ledford would have celebrated his 50th anniversary of priesthood this spring and has served many parishes in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. At St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Saint Albans, he served as a deacon from 1974 to 1975. After his ordination to the priesthood, he was associate pastor of St. Joseph the Worker Parish in Weirton from 1975 to 1977, chaplain of WV Northern Community College from 1975-1976, and associate pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Huntington from 1977 to 1981. He served as Chaplain of the Knights of Columbus Council #931 (Huntington) from 1977-1981.

Father Ledford then became pastor of Holy Trinity Parish in Nitro in 1981 to 1994, while also serving as pastor of Christ the King in Dunbar from 1984-1994. He then served as pastor of St. Anthony Parish in Follansbee from 1994 to 1996, St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Berkeley Springs from 1996 to 2002, and Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in Stonewood from 2002 to 2010. While in Stonewood, he also served as designated pastor of Notre Dame High School in Clarksburg from 2006 to 2008. He then served as pastor of St. James the Greater Parish in Charles Town from 2010 to 2018, and chaplain to the Knights of Columbus Council #2931 in 2011. Father Ledford was appointed to the Presbyteral Council for the diocese that same year serving until 2013. He was

appointed vicar forane of the Martinsburg Vicariate and as pilgrimage director for the diocese in 2012. The following year, he served as temporary administrator of St. Leo Parish in Inwood. In 2014, he was elected to the Board of Directors for the Priests' Health and Retirement Association.

In June 2018, Father Ledford was appointed pastor of St. Jude Parish in Glen Dale and vicar forane of the Wheeling Vicariate in 2020, serving in both roles until his passing.

Father Ledford served as a pro-synodal judge of the Tribunal of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston from 1981 to present, and deanery moderator of the Charleston Area Diocesan Council of Catholic Women from 1981 to 1989. He was a 4th Degree Knight of Columbus and was the state chaplain of West Virginia Knights of Columbus from 1983 to 1985.

He was as an associate member of the Fraternal Order of Police, a member of the National Railway Historical Society, and the National Association of Railroad Passengers. He was a member of the Lions Club in Moundsville at the time of his passing, and had been a member of the Lions Clubs across West Virginia since 1977.

Father Ledford was an active member of inter-faith clergy associations in each community and county assigned, most recently the Harrison County Clergy Association from 2002-2010, South Jefferson Clergy Association from 2010-2018, and the Moundsville Area Clergy Association from 2018 to present.

Accolades he was certainly proud of included serving as chaplain and lieutenant for the Weirton Police Reserve, and chaplain and reserve deputy sheriff of the Cabell

County Sheriff's Department. He was fondly referred to as "Fr. John the Sheriff" by his parishioners and communities.

Prior to becoming a priest, Father Ledford worked as a deputy for several counties in Tennessee in the late 1960s while attending the University of Tennessee. As a priest his reserve police and sheriff department duties were unpaid.

He was preceded in death by his parents Selwin and Katherine Ledford, and brother Lavoy Ledford. He is survived by his sister-in-law Jamie Clayton Ledford; nieces Karin Graser and Molly Ledford; and several great nieces and nephews.

Reception of the Body was Thursday, Jan. 16, at St. Jude Church in Glen Dale, with Father Doney Chacko, RCJ, presiding. Visitation was at the church. A Vigil was held at St. Jude with Very Rev. Donald X. Higgs, associate V.E., V.F., presiding, Very Rev. John Rice, V.G., V.F., as the homilist.

On Friday, Jan. 17, visitation will be held at the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Wheeling, from 9-11:45 a.m. The Mass of Christian Burial will be at noon with Bishop Mark Brennan as celebrant.

Interment will be in Tennessee where Father Ledford will be buried with his family.

Funeral Mass will be livestreamed on the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston webpage, [www.dwc.org](http://www.dwc.org), and on the diocesan Facebook page.

Arrangements by Altmeyer Funeral Home, 1400 Eoff Street, Wheeling, WV (<https://www.altmeyerfuneralhomes.com>).

In lieu of flowers, Father Ledford requested memorial contributions be made to the Seminarian Education Fund for the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston.



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# Seminarian Michael Tupta Receives Ministry of Lector at the Pontifical North American College

On Jan. 12, 2025, His Excellency John J. Kennedy, Secretary of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, conferred the Ministry of Lector in the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception at the Pontifical North American College, Vatican City State, on 34 seminarians. Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston seminarian Michael Joseph Tupta, III was among them.

Addressing the new lectors in his homily, Archbishop Kennedy encouraged them to proclaim the Word of God with faithfulness and joy. He went on to say, "by the faithfulness and commitment in your proclamation of the Word of God, the faithful will come to know how strongly you yourself believe in the word that you proclaim."

As part of the rite, Archbishop Kennedy placed the Holy Scriptures in the hands of each candidate and said, "Take this book of holy

Scripture and be faithful in handing on the word of God, so that it may grow strong in the hearts of his people."

The seminarians, currently in their first year of theological formation for the priesthood, will have three additional years of theological, spiritual, and pastoral formation before being ordained to the priesthood in their home dioceses.

The Pontifical North American College serves as the American seminary in Rome. Founded in 1859 by Blessed Pius IX, the College has formed over 5,000 priests near the heart of the Church for service in dioceses around the United States, Canada, and Australia. The College strengthens the bonds between Rome and local Churches worldwide, and it allows its students a firsthand encounter of the Church's rich religious and cultural heritage.



Photo credit: Pontifical North American College  
His Excellency John J. Kennedy, Secretary of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, places the Holy Scriptures in the hands of Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston seminarian Michael Joseph Tupta, III. Archbishop Kennedy conferred the Ministry of Lector on 34 seminarians in the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception at the Pontifical North American College, Vatican City State, Jan. 12.

## St. Joseph School Receives Grant for Safety and Security Committee Fund

**MARTINSBURG**—Saint Joseph School recently received a \$1,000 grant from the Eastern West Virginia Community Foundation's McMillan Family Fund to support its Safety and Security Committee Fund.

In an effort to increase security on the school campus, the school is implementing a facial-recognition system, increased the number of security cameras on the premises and added protective coverings for some glass in the main building at 110 E. Stephen St. Vestibules are being installed in all three school buildings, and the outdoor lights on the main building will be replaced with LED varieties.

"We are incredibly grateful to the Eastern West Virginia Community Foundation and the McMillan Family Fund for this wonderful donation," said Principal Maria Byrd. "The safety of our students, staff and school family members is a top priority, and this generous gift enables us to continue taking steps to ensure they are protected."

The Community Foundation was established in 1995 and awards more than \$1 million in grants and scholarships annually. With more than 280 endowed funds and assets of just more than \$35 million, EWVCF is one of the largest grant-making organizations serving the Eastern Panhandle.

The foundation is at the historic Caperton Train Station at 229 E. Martin St., Suite 4, in Martinsburg. For more information, go to [www.EWVCF.org](http://www.EWVCF.org); or call (304) 264-0353.

# Quo Vadis Retreat

## Middle School Discernment Retreat

Boys in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades are invited!

11 am on June 30  
through 1pm on July 3

Priest Field Pastoral Center  
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Campers will enjoy outdoor activities including:

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The camp is staffed by laypeople, priests  
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To Register, scan the QR code or visit [WVPriests.org](http://WVPriests.org)





# Forty Hours

EXPOSITION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

Join us in the adoration of the Eucharist for 40 hours January 17th - January 19th.

**The sign up sheet is in the vestibule. Please consider claiming a time to sit with our Lord.**



## Schedule for 40 Hours Devotion 1/17-1/19

### Friday, Jan. 17th

6:00 PM—Exposition and Vespers with Preached Sermon  
9:30 PM— Compline

### Saturday, Jan. 18th

8:00 AM—Office of Readings and Lauds  
8:30 AM—Votive Mass of The Most Holy Eucharist  
12:00 PM—Recitation of the Angelus and the Most Holy Rosary  
5:00 PM—Vespers followed by Simple Reposition  
5:30 PM—Saturday Vigil Mass  
9:30 PM—Chanted Compline

### Sunday, Jan 19th

9:30 AM—Office of Readings and Lauds followed by Simple Reposition  
10:30 AM—Solemn Mass  
6:00 PM—Solemn Vespers and Benediction with Preached Sermon



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# *Hope* GALA

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**Location: The White Palace**  
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Proceeds from this Gala directly support our mission in 17 counties in northern West Virginia, including our Catholic Charities Neighborhood Center on 18th Street in Wheeling, and other programs and services for children, seniors and families.

**Purchase tickets at <https://www.ccwva.org/event/gala/>**

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# First Catholic in Recovery Meeting in Wheeling Set for Jan. 23

**WHEELING** — The first meeting of Catholic in Recovery—Wheeling Area will be on Thursday, Jan. 23, at 7:30 p.m. in the Columbia Room of St. Alphonsus Church (2111 Market St., Wheeling). The initial meeting will be an introduction to Catholic in Recovery and to each other. “We can, as a group decide when, where, and how often we meet,” Father John D. Soplinski said. The Columbia Room, he added, is an option moving forward, but the group is not bound to stay there if something

more convenient is suggested.

Catholic in Recovery is a non-profit organization that seeks to serve those suffering from addictions and unhealthy attachments (including alcoholism, drug addiction, pornography addiction, sex and relationship addiction, compulsive overeating and food addictions, gambling addiction, codependency and the impact on family, and general fear, control, and anxiety).

The organization was started by the passion of Scott Weeman as he

found healing and new life through the help of twelve-step recovery and the sacramental love and mercy provided by the Catholic Church. The organization supports parishes and communities with group resources that draw people closer to these two powerful sources of grace. It is the aim of Catholic in Recovery to share the Good News that God can bring about healing and recovery, even in the most hopeless of cases.

For any questions about the meeting in Wheeling, please con-

# Catholic Charities West Virginia Serves More Than 200 Families in Webster Care Christmas Distribution



Courtesy photo

The Webster County office of Catholic Charities West Virginia (CCWVa) served over 200 area families at the 18th Webster Care Christmas distribution. CCWVa volunteers who made it happen in one day and the donors are: The Snowshoe Foundation, The O’Neil Foundation, St. Anne Parish, St. Jane de Chantal, St. James, Bergoo Baptist church, Gladeview Community church, Elk Valley Chapel, Emmanuel Assembly of God, Robert & Kim Bucchi, Bryan Moore, Tom Cogar Lumber, Joann Miller, United Bank, Annabelle Armentrout, Geri Kolesar, Sandy Cochran, Samantha Crites, Marie Green, Carol Green and Hope Hamrick. Families received food to prepare Christmas dinner and gifts for children. Tables with the gifts are shown above.

## Charleston Catholics Invited to Sign up to Attend March for Life

Join us for a great adventure to D.C. on Friday, Jan. 24th where we will join thousands of other people who choose to show their love and support of unborn children and their mothers by peacefully marching through the streets of our nation’s capital. Email Father Phillip Szabo at [pszabo@dwc.org](mailto:pszabo@dwc.org) and ask him to send you more information as well as the link to sign up!



**MJ T**

**MICHAEL J. TUPTA, D.D.S.**

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20/20 Vision Series for 2025

# A CLOSER LOOK AT THE APPALACHIAN PASTORAL LETTERS

“THIS LAND IS HOME TO ME” (1975)

“AT HOME IN THE WEB OF LIFE” (1995)

“THE TELLING TAKES US HOME” (2015)

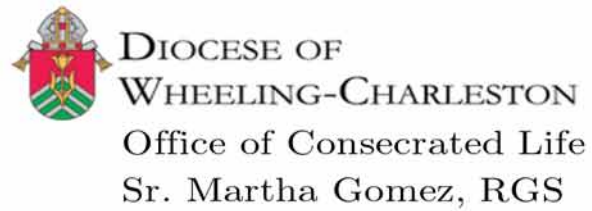
Note: Each session will begin at 7 pm and will be presented via Zoom.

- January 27 OUR HOME, OUR HISTORY – Bishop Mark Brennan
- February 24 THIS LAND IS HOME TO ME, PART I – Tom Breiding
- March 31 THIS LAND IS HOME TO ME, PART II
- April 28 THIS LAND IS HOME TO ME, PART III
- May 19 AT HOME IN THE WEB OF LIFE, PART I – Beth Collins
- June 23 AT HOME IN THE WEB OF LIFE, PART III
- July 28 AT HOME IN THE WEB OF LIFE, PART III
- August 25 THE TELLING TAKES US HOME, PART I – Rodica Stoicoiu
- September 22 THE TELLING TAKES US HOME, PART II
- October 27 THE TELLING TAKES US HOME, PART III
- November 24 AN EVENING OF APPALACHIAN MUSIC – Tom Breiding
- December 15 WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? – Bishop Mark Brennan

(Series originated by Ms. Shirley Carter, B.A., M.A.A.T.)

Cost for complete series: \$120.00 Or \$15.00 per session.

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# Fire Captain Makes Way through Ruins of Incinerated Church to Find Tabernacle Intact

By Ann Rodgers, OSV News

**LOS ANGELES (OSV News)** — Four days after Corpus Christi Church was incinerated in the Palisades Fire, Capt. Bryan Nassour of the Los Angeles Fire Department picked his way over a 6-foot layer of rubble in the ashen bones of the sanctuary and recovered the tabernacle Jan. 11.

“I did it because the whole community has been decimated — it looks like a nuclear bomb has gone off and nothing is standing,” Nassour told Angelus, the news outlet of the Los Angeles Archdiocese. Nassour is a member of St. Francis de Sales Church in Sherman Oaks, and his brother belongs to Corpus Christi.

“My brother lost his home. I have close friends who lost everything but the shirts on their backs, and they belong to that church too. So, if I could save just one thing, let it be this, so they have something to believe in,” he said.

That Saturday morning Nassour, whose station in Pacific Palisades is across the street from Corpus Christi, had been up all night battling other fires. As he sipped coffee at his desk and gazed at the ruined church, he decided to check for valuables. He wanted to protect them from looters and perhaps return something meaningful to the parish.

Scorched bricks, tiles and hunks of debris filled the nave so high that he had to crawl under the top of door frames that no longer had doors. The roof had collapsed, a burned steel frame teetered above the twisted remains of a chandelier. The pews had been consumed. Only the granite altar remained, with the solid brass tabernacle atop it and a cross above. The Blessed Sacrament was intact.

Nassour was astounded to find that the tabernacle

weighed more than 300 lbs. His crew helped him get it into the station house.

“It was one of the most uplifting things,” he said. “Not everyone is religious, but they saw that and they’re like, ‘This is awesome.’ We’re doing something — at least one thing — that we can salvage for the community.”

He made many calls before he was able to reach Msgr. Liam Kidney of Corpus Christi to tell him that the tabernacle was safe and undamaged.

“He was in utter disbelief,” Nassour said.

Nassour offered to search for other sacred objects and the priest told him where to find the chalices and patens. Firefighters from Station 69 helped dig for the crushed cabinet. The chalices and patens had been severely damaged. But the firefighters recovered other sacred objects, including three unbroken containers of holy oil.

Brass withstands high

heat, but Nassour suspects more was involved in the tabernacle’s survival.

“Talk to any firefighter. In any religious building what usually survives is the cross and certain specific items that are highly religious, unless they’ve been specifically set on fire,” he said.

Gabe Sanchez, a retired FBI special agent who does contract investigations for

the Los Angeles Archdiocese, was sent to retrieve the tabernacle. Firefighters

helped him wrestle it into his car. He drove it to St. Monica Church, where Msgr. Kidney celebrated Mass for survivors the next day.

At that Mass, the tabernacle stood on a table by the altar. Msgr. Kidney recounted Nassour calling him

to ask, “I have found this big gold box. What would you like me to do with it?”

The Corpus Christi parishioners burst into applause.

Nassour was unable to attend because he was fighting fires.

(Ann Rodgers writes for Angelus, the news outlet of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.)

## Our Lady of Champion



OSV News photo/Sam Lucero

A stained-glass window at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion in Champion, Wis., depicts the Blessed Virgin Mary appearing to Adele Brise. Several Catholics who have fled the wildfires ravaging Los Angeles have been praying for the intercession of Our Lady of Champion, who once saved a rural Wisconsin shrine from a devastating inferno.

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# Pope Offers Prayers for Those Impacted by LA Wildfires

By **Cindy Wooden, Catholic News Service**

**VATICAN CITY (CNS)** — “I am praying for all of you,” Pope Francis said, using his televised Sunday Angelus address to speak directly to the people impacted by the wildfires in Southern California.

“I am close to the residents of Los Angeles County, California, where devastating fires have broken out in recent days,” the pope told thousands of people gathered in St. Peter’s Square Jan. 12 to pray the Angelus with him.

In a telegram released by the Vatican the previous day, Pope Francis also assured the people of Los Angeles of his prayers as the

fires continued to cause death and destruction.

“Entrusting the souls of the deceased to the loving mercy of almighty God, His Holiness sends heartfelt condolences to those who mourn their loss,” said a telegram sent by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, to Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles.

The fires, fueled by dry conditions and warm winds, began Jan. 7. As of 6 p.m. local time Jan. 11, the Los Angeles County medical examiner’s office said 16 people had been confirmed dead. More than 150,000 people were ordered to evacuate their homes and thou-

sands of structures, including houses and churches, have been destroyed.

The telegram to Archbishop Gomez, said, “Saddened by the loss of life and the widespread destruction caused by the fires near Los Angeles, His Holiness Pope Francis

assures you and the communities affected by this tragedy of his spiritual closeness.”

“He likewise prays for the relief efforts of the emergency services personnel and imparts his blessing to all as a pledge of consolation and strength in the Lord,” it said.

## Biden Awards Pope Presidential Medal of Freedom, Nation’s Highest Civilian Honor

By **Kate Scanlon, OSV News**

**WASHINGTON (OSV News)** — President Joe Biden awarded Pope Francis the Presidential Medal of Freedom with Distinction, the nation’s highest civilian honor, the White House said Jan. 11.

Biden, the nation’s second Catholic president, spoke with the pontiff to name him a recipient of the award, the White House said. It marked the only time in his presidency Biden bestowed that award “with distinction,” the announcement added.

On Jan. 8 Biden canceled a trip to Italy that had been scheduled for Jan. 9-12. It would have included an audience with Pope Francis and would have been his final foreign trip as president. The cancellation came in the wake of the devastating wildfires raging in California.

Pope Francis’ mission of serving the poor “has never ceased,” the White House said in its statement about the award.

“A loving pastor, he joyfully answers children’s questions about God. A challenging teacher, he commands us to fight for peace and protect the planet. A welcoming leader, he reaches out to different faiths,” the statement said. “The first pope from the Southern Hemisphere, Pope Francis is unlike any who came before. Above all, he is the People’s Pope — a light of faith, hope, and love that shines brightly across the world.”

The Presidential Medal of Freedom with Distinction has rarely

been bestowed in recent decades. But Biden himself is one such recipient. Then-President Barack Obama awarded Biden, who was then vice president, with such a medal in 2017. Another pontiff has also received the award. Then-President George W. Bush awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom with Distinction to St. John Paul II in 2004.

Biden last met with Pope Francis at the Group of Seven summit in Puglia, Italy, June 14, where they had a brief private bilateral meeting, according to Catholic News Service. The pair also spoke by telephone in December, the White House said, and shortly after that call, Biden commuted the sentences of 37 of the 40 individuals on federal death row to life sentences without the possibility of parole. Pope Francis and other Catholic opponents of the death penalty had sought such action.

On Oct. 29, 2021, Biden, accompanied by first lady Jill Biden, met with the pope at the Vatican. Biden spent 75 minutes talking to the pope privately and later told reporters that the pope had indicated that he was a “good Catholic.”

In a Jan. 11 post on X announcing the award, Biden is shown in a photo in the Oval Office accompanied by Cardinal Christophe Pierre, the papal nuncio to the U.S.

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

## A message from the West Virginia Knights of Columbus State Council

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# Upcoming Faith Formation and Catechetical Certification Opportunities Available

**WEST VIRGINIA**—There are two upcoming Faith Formation and Catechetical Certification opportunities beginning.

These are five-week courses beginning Jan. 20. They are offered through the University of Dayton's Virtual Learning Community for Faith Formation (VLCFF). These courses are hybrid models and are composed of both weekly live two-hour Zoom lectures/discussions as well as a rich variety of online course materials and discussion experiences through the VLCFF. The courses are being underwritten by the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston's Office of Evangelization & Catechesis, who pays 100% of the tuition and the cost of any books associated with the courses. The course instructor is Dr. Rodica Stoicoiu. For further information or to register, please contact Stoicoiu at rodicastoicoiuphd@gmail.com.

The Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston offers Catechetical Certification and recognizes VLCFF courses for various levels of certification. Certain courses are especially designed for volunteer catechists, Catholic school religion teachers, members of OCIA teams and all those who would be enriched by formal training in this field. For further information regarding the VLCFF certification program please contact Stoicoiu. There are 6 required courses for level one certification including the Survey of Doctrine class below. Both classes are open to all adults interested in deepening their faith and growing in their understanding of the theology and Tradition of the Church.

Survey of Catholic Doctrine:

This course is part of the level one certification for catechesis. It is open to all who are interested in learning more about their faith. If you are a catechist, a Catholic school religion teacher, or a member of an OICA team you will find this course especially helpful!

During this course we will come to a better understanding of some of the major doctrines of the Catholic Church, including: the Trinity, original sin, church, salvation history and the communion of saints. By the completion of the course, participants will be familiar with concepts such as the magisterium, ecumenism and eschatology. This course includes online material and a two-hour weekly zoom meeting on Wednesday evenings 7-9 p.m. beginning Jan. 23. This course is a basic course and is an introductory course in the Catholic Faith.

To register or for further information please contact Stoicoiu.

Scripture and Justice: What is our biblical vision of a just community? How are we ordered towards justice and cooperation through the Old and New Testaments? How does scripture provide us with the framework for living justly today? In this course we will study how scripture forms the basis for our Catholic understanding of justice and how justice is an essential part of God's plan for the reign of God, the message of Christ, and the way we the baptized are to live in the world today. This course includes online readings and material and a two hour zoom lecture/discussion Monday evenings from 7-9 p.m. beginning Jan. 20.

To register or for further information please contact Stoicoiu.



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This will be a weekend filled with talks, prayer, and fellowship. This year's focus is learning to hear God's voice in prayer - and what to do once you've heard it. We start Friday evening, go through Saturday, and wrap up after Mass and breakfast on Sunday morning. For more details, or if you have any questions, please contact Laura Mead (info under registration).

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# El Papa reza por las personas afectadas por los incendios en Los Ángeles

Por Cindy Wooden, Catholic News Service

**CIUDAD DEL VATICANO (CNS)** — "Rezo por todos vosotros", dijo el Papa Francisco, utilizando su discurso televisado del Ángelus del domingo para hablar directamente a las personas afectadas por los incendios forestales en el sur de California.

"Estoy cerca de los habitantes del Condado de Los Ángeles, California, donde en los días pasados se han producido incendios devastadores", dijo el Papa a miles de personas reunidas en la Plaza de San Pedro el 12 de enero para rezar el Ángelus con él.

En un telegrama difundido por el Vaticano el día anterior, el Papa Francisco también aseguró a la gente de Los Ángeles sus oraciones mientras los incendios seguían causando muerte y destrucción.

"Confiando las almas de los difuntos a la amorosa misericordia de Dios todopoderoso, Su Santidad envía sentidas condolencias a quienes lloran su pérdida", decía un telegrama enviado por el cardenal Pietro Parolin, secretario

de Estado del Vaticano, al arzobispo de Los Ángeles, José H. Gomez.

Los incendios, alimentados por la sequía y los vientos cálidos, comenzaron el 7 de enero. En la mañana del 13 de enero, un centro médico forense del condado de Los Ángeles había confirmado la muerte de 24 personas, reportó Associated Press. También se han reportado más de 15 personas desaparecidas, cifra que podría aumentar. Más de 150.000 personas tuvieron que evacuar sus hogares y miles de estructuras, incluidas casas e iglesias, han quedado destruidas.

El telegrama al arzobispo Gómez, decía: "Entristecido por la pérdida de vidas y la destrucción generalizada causada por los incendios cerca de Los Ángeles, Su Santidad el Papa Francisco le asegura a usted y a las comunidades afectadas por esta tragedia su cercanía espiritual".

"Asimismo, reza por los esfuerzos de socorro del personal de los servicios de emergencia e imparte su bendición a todos como prenda de consuelo y fortaleza en el Señor", continuó.

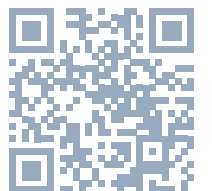


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**Para denunciar presuntos casos de abuso sexual de niños:** La Diócesis de Wheeling-Charleston alienta a informar ante las autoridades civiles ante todo si se ha cometido un delito. También alentamos a utilizar [www.reportbishopabuse.org](http://www.reportbishopabuse.org) 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](http://www.reportbishopabuse.org).

**Para informar a las autoridades civiles:** comuníquese con la policía local; los números varían 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 eclesiales 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; 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](http://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](http://www.dwc.org), en "Rendición de cuentas", luego "Informar mala conducta" o llamando al 844.723.8381. EthicsPoint es un sistema de informes de terceros que informa a las autoridades civiles cuando corresponda y a las autoridades diocesanas, y la identidad de la persona que informa esta protegida. Enlaces e información: Departamento de Salud y Recursos Humanos de WV: <https://www.wvdhhr.org/report.asp>. Policía Estatal de Virginia Occidental, Unidad de Crímenes contra Niños: 304-293-6400.



# Employment Opportunities

## Principal of St. Francis de Sales Central Catholic School, Morgantown, W.Va.

St. Francis de Sales Central Catholic School (SFdSCCS) in Morgantown is seeking applicants for the anticipated vacancy of Principal for the 2025-26 school year.

Beginning July 1, 2025 SFdSCCS will transition to a President/Principal leadership model. At that time, Mr. Arthur Moore, currently serving in his thirteenth year as Principal of SFdSCCS, will shift from his current role to that of President. In today's world, Catholic school leaders must focus not only on academic leadership but also prioritize the advancement functions of the school such as: enrollment, strategic planning, projects, fundraising, public relations, and marketing. Separating these two roles will allow for a better focus on day-to-day responsibilities at the building level (i.e. Principal), as well as the handling of long-term management and overall strength of the school from a strategic planning standpoint (i.e. President). Though the new Principal and President will work in separate capacities to oversee the comprehensive administrative aspects of managing the school, they will have a shared duty of ensuring the mission and philosophy of the school remain at the forefront. The ideal candidate for Principal must have a strong commitment to their faith life, including a passion for Catholic education. He or she should demonstrate the ability to lead faculty/staff members in a Christ-like fashion and remain professional in all circumstances. The candidate will foster a positive culture within the building, promote academic growth, act with purpose in his or her decision-making, and have a keen attention to detail. He or she will be one who understands that teaching is an art and can inspire and direct teachers to reach their full potential. The candidate will exhibit good administrative and social skills to interact with parents and students, and the ability to communicate with the School Pastor and President. The candidate needs an understanding of what it means to be a good steward of resources entrusted to the school, and ensure that building, facilities, and grounds remain in top shape. Lastly, the candidate understands that this is a ministerial position at a religious institution and that there are officially taught and

commonly accepted beliefs in our program. The communication of which is a fundamental purpose and mission of a Catholic school, and its students and staff have a right to expect such communication implicitly and explicitly from its principal.

### Requirements:

- Practicing Catholic with a strong commitment to Catholic education
- Master's Degree (or higher) in Educational Leadership or School Administration
- Valid Educational Leadership Certification from the state of West Virginia or from a state that has reciprocity with West Virginia
- Minimum of 5+ years of successful teaching experience
- Minimum of 2+ years in the field of school administration

### Preferred Skill Set:

- Excellent administrative, communication, and interpersonal skills
- Strong leadership skills and initiative
- Keen attention to detail
- Superior ability to manage multiple functional areas and set clear expectations
- Experience in curriculum and professional staff development
- Authentic role model for the teachers, students, and parents
- Role Model for Faith-Based Leadership
- High Emotional Intelligence (EQ)
- Interpersonal Effectiveness
- Collaborative Leadership
- Conflict Prevention and Resolution Skills
- Strong Organizational and Personnel Management
- Ability to Motivate and Establish Trust
- Creative and Effective Problem Solver
- Work with people beyond giving and receiving instructions. Must be adaptable to performing under stress and when confronted with emergency situations

**About Our School:** We are a thriving central school that serves four Catholic parishes in Morgantown, WV. For more than a century, dat-

ing back to 1915, SFdSCCS has consistently remained a beacon of Catholic education in the Morgantown community. Rooted in its mission statement, "Here to serve, not to be served", SFdSCCS strives to produce well-rounded students who go forth with a firm foundation in faith and academics. Conveniently located at the intersection of two major interstates (I-68 and I-79), SFdSCCS sits just above St. Francis de Sales Parish on a picturesque exquisitely maintained 53-acre campus. Our PK2-8th program has a strong enrollment of 450 and is served by a competent, passionate, and nurturing faculty and staff. SFdSCCS is a resource rich community, with West Virginia University and Ruby Memorial Hospital (West Virginia's largest) at the epicenter of jobs. By all standards, our school is well-positioned for success into the foreseeable future and has built a strong reputation for academic excellence over its long history. Our commitment to quality education has made us a leading Catholic school in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston and the entire state of West Virginia. We continuously strive to maintain this distinction by upgrading our facilities and instructional programs, while offering enriching extracurricular activities to complement our academic curriculum. Graduates of our program regularly transition to Honors and AP courses in high school and are consistently inducted into the National Honor Society with many graduates ultimately becoming Valedictorian or Salutatorian in their respective high schools. We maintain two classrooms per grade level and offer a comprehensive preschool program for children 2 years of age until kindergarten. Our strong enrollment fortifies our financial position, allowing us to make strategic investments and to provide competitive salaries for our teachers and staff.

**Person To Contact:** All interested candidates should email a letter of interest, updated resume, and three reference letters to Principal Arthur Moore at [amoore@sfccs.org](mailto:amoore@sfccs.org) or call at (304) 291-5070. Applications will be accepted through Friday, February 21, 2024. Additional details about this job vacancy can be provided upon request.

## St. John XXIII Pastoral Center Job Opening – Cook

The Cook at St. John XXIII Pastoral Center, as a member of Diocesan Services, is committed to advancing the mission of Jesus Christ and offering hospitality to our guests. The Cook is responsible for the preparation, service, clean-up and storage of all meals, snacks and food service for special functions. Assures the kitchen/dining room/dish room areas are clean and in good order at the end of a shift or function. Oversees and assists kitchen aides in the preparation, service and storage of food and cleanliness of the kitchen/dining area. Works early mornings, days, evenings, weekends and holidays/holydays as needed. Prefer a minimum of one year experience in food service.

For more information, contact the Director, Gerri Wright at (304) 342-0507.

## St. John XXIII Pastoral Center Job Opening – Guest Services Coordinator

The Guest Services Coordinator at St. John XXIII Pastoral Center, as a member of Diocesan Services, is committed to advancing the mission of Jesus Christ and offering hospitality to our guests.

The Guest Services Coordinator is responsible for working with guests to plan and book lodging and events. Some of the required qualifications include multi-tasker, problem solver & self-starter, detail oriented, excellent written & verbal skills, computer knowledge, team player and welcoming & respectful to all faith & secular guests. Additionally, the position entails the ability to perform the physical requirements of kitchen aide & housekeeper.

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

For more information and to schedule an interview, contact the Director, Gerri Wright at (304) 342-0507 or [gwright@dwc.org](mailto:gwright@dwc.org)



# Employment Opportunities

## Coordinator, Northern Panhandle Continuum of Care

At Catholic Charities West Virginia (CCWVa), we have a culture deeply rooted in Catholic social teaching and respect all Catholic beliefs and practices.

The Northern Panhandle Continuum of Care (NPCOC) Coordinator is responsible for the general administration of the NPCOC. The coordinator is responsible for collaborating and coordinating with homeless and housing resources across the five counties of the Northern Panhandle service area. The coordinator administers entitlement funds from HUD and other financial resources, oversees special projects and existing services with the NPCOC and makes recommendations involving strategic planning. The coordinator acts as an advisor to the Board.

**ESSENTIAL DUTIES:** Ensure compliance with laws, regulations, program guidelines, and contractual obligations of all NPCOC funded entities. Provide regular communication with existing and new applicants for NPCOC funding. Engage with stakeholders through the entire NPCOC. Assist in writing and submission of the NPCOC Collaborative Application in partnership with the Executive Team and others selected to participate.

**QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS:** To perform this job successfully, an individual must be able to perform each essential duty satisfactorily. The require-

ments listed below are representative of the knowledge, skill and/or ability required.

Bachelor's degree in social work, education, or related field. Master's degree preferred. Licensed Social Worker preferred. Two (2) to five (5) years of progressive experience in similar position completing related tasks. Knowledge of issues related to homelessness. Highly organized, initiative-taking and ability to work with little supervision. Excellent interpersonal communication skills and computer skills. Ability to multi-task. Excellent oral and written community skills.

**PHYSICAL DEMANDS:** The physical demands described here are representative of those that must be met by an employee to successfully perform the essential functions of this job.

**WORK ENVIRONMENT:** The work environment characteristics described here are representative of those an employee encounters while performing the essential functions of this job.

- Hybrid position with office available in Weirton, Wheeling, or New Martinsville.
- Must reside in Hancock, Brooke, Ohio, Marshall, or Wetzel counties.
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8:30 WVNS FOX 59	Beckley-Bluefield-Oak Hill (Lewisburg)
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The nation-leading cardiologists and surgeons of the WVU Heart and Vascular Institute Structural Heart Program at Wheeling specialize in problems with the heart's valves, walls, or chambers.

We have a multidisciplinary team of experts, including interventional cardiologists, **cardiac and vascular surgeons, dedicated nursing staff, and other specialists**, to ensure our patients receive the most comprehensive care available for common and complex structural heart conditions.

The WVU Heart and Vascular Institute Structural Heart Program is the only program in West Virginia that offers eight specialized, structural heart procedures and is one of the few programs in the United States (and the only one in West Virginia) offering cerebral embolic protection during transcatheter aortic valve replacement (Protected TAVR) and transcatheter mitral valve replacement.

Our expert team uses the latest catheter-based techniques to treat all forms of structural heart disease, including aortic, mitral, and tricuspid valve diseases and conditions and congenital defects.

### OUR TEAM



David Michael Campsey MD  
Interventional Cardiology



Deepak Hooda MD  
Interventional Cardiology



Sushant Sharma MD  
Cardiology

Learn more at: [MyWVUHeart.com](http://MyWVUHeart.com)

**Appointments: 304-243-8362**

**WVU** Heart & Vascular Institute