

THE CATHOLIC

Spirit

Amid Unrest Over Immigration Enforcement, USCCB President Calls for 'Holy Hour for Peace'

By Daniel Payne

(CNA)—Archbishop Paul Coakley, the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), has urged his fellow bishops and priests in the United States to offer a "Holy Hour for peace" among ongoing unrest and violence around the country stemming from federal immigration enforcement.

A centuries-old Catholic devotion in which the faithful reflect, worship, and pray fervently, often before the Blessed Sacrament, a Holy Hour can be spent praying for a variety of

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Snowstorm Shows Just How Important Mass is to Mountain State Catholics

By Colleen Rowan

WEST VIRGINIA— Under a state of emergency for the impending winter storm that was expected to bring snow accumulations of up to 12 inches as well as ice and freezing rain, West Virginia Catholics filled their parish churches on Saturday, Jan. 24, for vigil Masses, determined not to miss their Sunday obligation.

"The church was so packed, as if it were Christmas or Ash Wednesday," Father Brian Crenwelge, pastor

of St. John University Parish in Morgantown and director of Campus Ministry at West Virginia University, said in a post on his parish's Facebook Page. "It was so heartening to see so many people come so that they wouldn't miss Mass and the Eucharist because of the snow. It shows the importance of the Holy Eucharist in their lives."

"The Church is not dying," he added. "The Mass is that important."

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West Virginia Catholics March for Life in Nation's Capitol and Here at Home

By Colleen Rowan

Wheeling Central Catholic High School freshman Levi Anderson had a bold message for motorists traveling on National Road in Wheeling on Jan. 23. "I am the Pro-Life Generation" his sign proclaimed. Anderson and his fellow Central Catholic students are certainly that, and they spent part of the day standing on both sides of the road in front of St. Michael Church in Wheeling voicing their concern for the unborn.

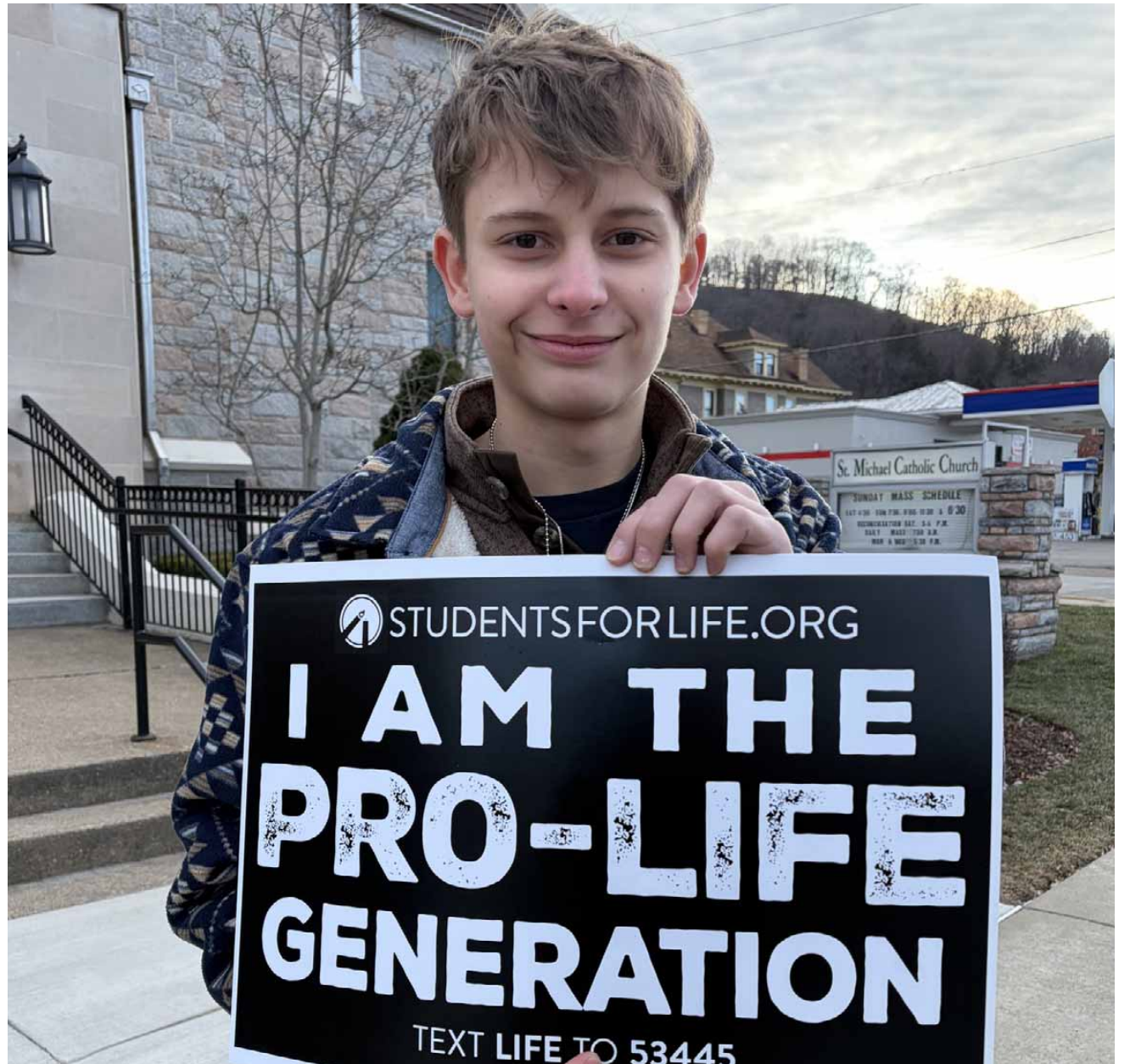
Their pro-life signs called for an end to abortion. "We choose life," "Love is ending abortion," and "After Roe, there is life" are among the messages they held.

The students' group, which advocates for the legal protection of unborn children, held the demonstration in conjunction with the 53rd annual March for Life in Washington which was taking place at the same time that day. Tens of thousands of people, young and old, from all walks of life and religious denominations, joined the march calling for an end to abortion.

Once again, West Virginia's young Catholics made a strong showing at the march.

"It was amazing to see all kinds of people in the Body of Christ speaking out on behalf of those who can't do it themselves," said Tristan Hudson, a senior at West Virginia

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Wheeling Central Catholic High School freshman Levi Anderson holds a message for motorists traveling on National Road in Wheeling on Jan. 23. That day, he and his fellow Central students held pro-life signs in support of protecting human life at all stages in conjunction with the March for Life in Washington. Courtesy photo

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causes, including vocations, life, and other matters of faith.

In his Jan. 28 statement, Archbishop Coakley cited the recent shooting deaths of two American citizens in Minneapolis, both of whom were killed by, and during altercations with, U.S. Department of Homeland Security officials.

The prelate also pointed to the death of a Cuban national who died after guards held him down at a detention facility in Texas. An autopsy report ruled his death a homicide.

Those deaths "are just a few of the tragic examples of the violence that represent failures in our society to respect the dignity of every human life," the archbishop said.

Mourning "this loss of life" and deploring "the indifference and injustice it represents," Archbishop Coakley said the "current climate of fear and polarization, which thrives when human dignity is disregarded, does not meet the standard set by Christ in the Gospel."

The archbishop said he was inviting his "brother bishops and priests" around the country to offer a Holy Hour for peace in response to the ongoing violence.

"Let us pray for reconciliation where there is division, for justice where there are violations of fundamental rights, and for consolation for all who feel overwhelmed by fear or loss," he said.

Archbishop Coakley said he encouraged Catholics everywhere to "participate, whether in parishes, chapels, or before the Lord present in the quiet of their hearts for healing in our nation and communities."

The archbishop in his message admitted that many people "feel powerless in the face of violence, injustice, and social unrest."

"To those who feel this way, I wish to say clearly: Your faithfulness matters. Your prayers matter. Your acts of love and works of justice matter," he said.

U.S. Catholic leaders in both Minnesota and elsewhere have called for peace amid the ongoing tension surrounding federal immigration actions, with Archbishop Coakley himself on Jan. 25 urging calm and restraint in Minneapolis as protesters regularly clash with federal agents.

Here is a link to the Holy Hour for peace resources: <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/adoration/holy-hour-for-peace>

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."

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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

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.

Mass ...

Cont'd from Page 1

The scene was the same at neighboring St. Francis de Sales Parish in Morgantown that night.

"Our people wanted to be at the altar before the arrival of the storm," said Msgr. Anthony Cincinnati, S.T.D., V.F., pastor of St. Francis. "I was both pleased and relieved that so many parishioners took advantage of the forecast provided and most attended on Saturday."

"Prayers continue for the safety of all, especially

those impacted by power outages and essential workers exposed to the harsh elements of this passing winter storm," he said.

St. Francis and all parishes of the diocese still had Sunday Mass for those who were close by and could easily attend. Those who could not make vigil Masses were assured that the obligation to participate in Sunday Mass does not bind them when serious obstacles arise such as inclement weather or serious illness in an e-mail message from Bishop Mark Brennan on Friday, Jan. 23.

"Severe weather that endangers personal safety is such an obstacle," the bishop wrote. "No one should feel compelled to place themselves in harm's way."

Very Rev. Carlos Melocoton, V.F., pastor of St. Michael Parish in Wheeling, said it was an inspiring Saturday Mass attendance at his church as well before the storm.

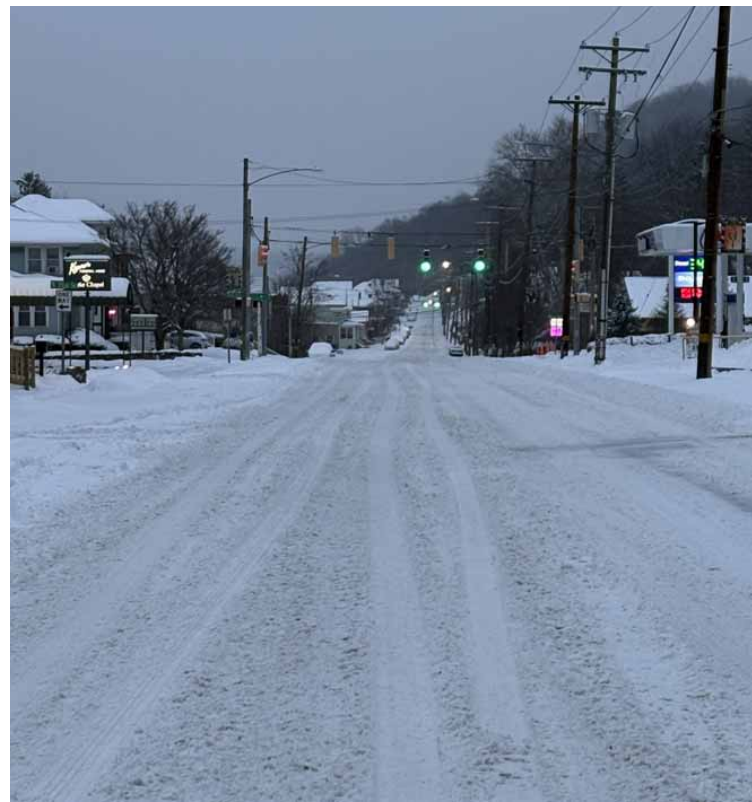
"It's like Christmas Vigil once again, about 500 plus," he said. "Even though Bishop Mark, out of his love and concern for the safety of our parishioners, sent a general dispensation out."

"It was deeply inspiring to see so many faithful drawn by love for the Holy Eucharist, trusting in the grace that flows from receiving Christ Himself—strengthening, uniting, and sustaining us with hope that Christ is truly present and walking with us," Father Melocoton said.

In Elkins, there was a moderate increase at the Saturday evening Mass at St. Brendan Parish. "However, seeing the number of parishioners changing their weekly routine in order to assure their participation in the Mass, I was reminded of how important of not only the reception of the Holy Eucharist is to them, but also the importance of gathering together with others in the communal celebration of Word



Photo courtesy of Terri Blaker
Volunteers shovel snow at St. Margaret Mary Parish in Parkersburg on Jan. 25 during the winter storm. The parish thanked its snow removal crew — Luke & Paul Zyla, Dan Blaker, Jeremy and Crystal Mader.



Colleen Rowan Photo

A usually busy West Virginia Route 2 in Warwood is quiet on the evening of Jan. 25 during the winter storm.

and Sacrament is to so many," said Father Jim O'Connor, pastor. "Of course, it is always encouraging to a pastor to see an increase in those joining in the celebration of Mass, that it still holds a priority in one's weekly practice of faith."

Bishop Brennan ended his message to the faithful calling on all to join in prayer for those who must work during the storm especially road crews and first responders, for the elderly and homebound, and for all who may be vulnerable during this time of cold and uncertainty.

"May the Lord keep you safe, grant you peace, and

remind you always of His nearness—whether on the road, in church, or at home," he said.

By Monday, Jan. 26, the storm had left more than 18 inches of snow on Davis and 16 inches on Newell, according to the National Weather Service. Ten inches fell on parts of Hancock, Brooke, and Ohio counties, while southern counties were pummeled with ice and freezing rain. In the days that followed, the state was struck with dangerous temperatures that fell to zero and below and wind chills of -20.

(Contributing to this story was Meg Partington in Martinsburg.)

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6:30 WOAY ABC 4	Beckley-Bluefield-Oak Hill (Lewisburg)
8:30 WVNS FOX 59	Beckley-Bluefield-Oak Hill (Lewisburg)
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March for Life Rallies Thousands to Build Culture of Life

By Peter Jesserer Smith

WASHINGTON (OSV News) — Tens of thousands of pro-life advocates descended on the March for Life demonstrating their strong motivation to give witness to the importance of protecting the right to life for the unborn. This year's march stressed the theme "Life is a Gift," but the event also showed visible cracks emerging in the movement's political vision and frustration with the Trump administration.

For Catholics attending the march from all corners of the U.S., the motivations were as strong as ever.

At St. Jude Parish in Waltham, Massachusetts, the bus ride of 30 parishioners of all ages is "a real pilgrimage," parochial vicar Jeremy St. Martin, who leads it, told OSV News. The bus left on Jan. 22, arriving 22 hours later — praying the Liturgy of the Hours along the way — at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington at 8 a.m. on Jan. 23, the day of the March for Life.

"We don't stop for breakfast or anything. Everyone knows it's a pilgrimage," he said.

Hallie Millerbernd, a senior nursing student at the University of Mary in Bismarck, North Dakota, told OSV News this is her third March for Life. The multi-bus pilgrimage from there

takes 60 nonstop hours, making it a real test of endurance.

She said the sight of "thousands of people of all ages carrying signs with different colored hats, singing songs and chanting" inspired her. "It also showed me that there was hope for change and that there was a large movement against abortion."

Ruby Galatolo, who came to Washington from the Diocese of Orlando, Florida, said she has tried to come every year since her first march in 2010. The experience was a turning point in her life, seeing "so many young people here so happy and hopeful."

Galatolo said she "never imagined that I would see the day when Roe v. Wade would be overturned," referring to the Supreme Court's 2022 Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization decision that returned the issue of abortion to lawmakers.

"Of course, there is still a long way to go," she said, adding that she continues to hope that ultimately abortion would become a thing of the past.

The Catholic Church was also strongly represented in Jan. 22-23 vigil events held around the 53rd March for Life, with thousands attending the National Prayer Vigil for Life held at the national basilica in Washington, the Life Fest event put on by the Knights of

Columbus and Sisters of Life in nearby Oxon Hill, Maryland, and the Life is VERY Good hosted by the Diocese of Arlington at the EagleBank Arena in Fairfax.

In his homily at the National Prayer Vigil for Life's closing Mass Jan. 23, Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley, who, with the exception of the COVID limitations in 2021, has been to every March for Life since the first one in 1974, exhorted participants to "look for opportunities to be apostles of life building a civilization of love and ethic of care."

"We're here today to proclaim life is a gift. It's a precious gift from a loving God," said Cardinal O'Malley, archbishop emeritus of Boston. "Together we can protect and nurture that gift of life ... The antidote to abortion is love, love manifest in community, compassion and solidarity."

Sister of Life Faustina Maria Pia told OSV News that she hoped the young people at Life Fest — which featured musical performances, Eucharistic adoration, a Eucharistic procession, Mass, confession and testimonies — would realize the gift of their own life.

"Today is a day that we really want to make a strong impact on our nation, to witness to this beautiful sanctity of human life," she said of the event. "There's no more powerful way than

to pray."

At the March for Life rally itself, March for Life president Jennie Bradley Lichter reminded the crowd that what has "saved so many lives and moved countless hearts" on the abortion issue over the years is the marchers' "unfailing hope," their "love for the littlest ones and for moms who need a hand," their joy and "the sheer number of you who are here year after year."

At the beginning of the rally, Lichter introduced the "Friends of Club 21" choir, a group of teens and young adults with Down syndrome, to sing the national anthem. She said the group embodied the theme of the march.

But this year's March event showed that amid the cultural unity, there was political fraying within the pro-life movement itself.

Lichter herself introduced Vice President JD Vance, who spoke in person at the rally, while President Donald Trump gave a video message reminding attendees of his role in helping overturn Roe v. Wade — "the greatest victory in its history" — and thanking "every single one of you who's out on this winter day, a beautiful day — but it's winter, nevertheless — to stand up for the unborn."

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Courtesy photo

Members of St. John University Parish and the Mountaineer Catholic Campus Ministry Program in Morgantown are gathered at the March for Life in Washington Jan. 23.

March ...

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University and active in the Mountaineer Catholic Campus Ministry Program. She attended the march with her fellow Mountaineer Catholic members and parishioners of St. John University Parish in Morgantown.

"This is our fifth year of renting a bus from St. John's to take college students and parishioners to the march," said Father Brian Crenwelge, pastor of St. John's and director of Campus Ministry at WVU. "Each year, we fill up the bus quickly!"

Some parishioners drove separately themselves, he said. Going to the March for Life each

year with his parishioners and WVU students reinforces the message of the gathering, Father Crenwelge said.

"I believe it's crucial for a parish to know that the right to life in the womb is the most important and basic right that precedes any other right," he said. "The more we teach our people

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Courtesy photos
 Students from St. Joseph School and St. Joseph High School in Martinsburg, teachers, and parents participate in the March for Life in Washington Jan. 23. Above: In the front row from left, are Jeanene Acuna; Annabelle Ayers; and Maria Byrd, principal of the schools. In the back row, from left, are Oliver Heng, Rebecca Sharp, and Richard Monroe. At right, the group marches with thousands to the U.S. Supreme Court.

March ...

Cont'd from Page 4

about this, the more the March for Life makes sense."

It's a great day for the group each year, he said. They begin with Mass at 6 a.m. before leaving for Washington.

"We march together in prayer," Father Crenwelge said. "I was so inspired this year by watching our college students singing Marian hymns as we marched. The march is a public witness to life, and I believe it's important that our students have an opportunity to grow in their pro-life convictions as they study in an environment that is completely the opposite. The march is joyful and prayerful, and it always seem like one, big family reunion."

Eastern Panhandle parishes and Catholic schools also brought a large group again this year. Maria Byrd, principal of St. Joseph School and St. Joseph High School in Martinsburg, along with middle/high school theology teacher Reece Lopatka and parents accompanied students from both schools to the march. They traveled with members of from St. James the Greater Parish in Charles Town and St. Joseph Parish in Martinsburg.

Knights of Columbus Monsignor Lackey Council 1169 helped fund the transportation provided by Varsity Travel and members of Catholic Daughters of the Americas Court 392 made lunches for the bus passengers.

(Contributing to this story was Meg Partington in Martinsburg.)



Courtesy photo
 Wheeling Central Catholic High School students hold pro-life signs on National Road in Wheeling Jan. 23 in conjunction with the March for Life in Washington.



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Life ...

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However, while Lichter praised the administration's pro-life policies, it was Vance who brought up "the elephant in the room," which he called "a fear" that "not enough progress has been made."

Various pro-life advocates and groups had begun to raise criticism of the second Trump administration, following a string of pro-life disappointments, such as Trump's recent comments to House Republicans telling them to be "flexible" on the Hyde Amendment, which prohibits public funding of elective abortions, in negotiations on health care subsidies.

Vance touted the administration's past accomplishments, citing actions including expanded conscience protection for health care workers, and "policies that make family life possible," such as "Trump accounts," government-backed savings accounts for newborns under the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act."

He also mentioned the recent announcement from him and his wife, Usha Vance, that they are expecting their fourth child, noting in his remarks last year, "I told you all one of the things I most wanted in the United States of America was more families and more babies."

"So let the record show you have a vice president who practices what he preaches," he said.

Vance's speech was generally well received by the crowd, but some attendees chanted "Ban the abortion pill." Several national pro-life groups have called on the Trump-Vance administration to roll back the Biden administration's actions on mifepristone, a pill commonly but not exclusively used for early abortion, to the regulations in place during the previous Trump-Pence administration. But the administration has not delivered on this, while approving a new generic form of the pill.

Vance, however, argued that the pro-life movement was better off today than it

was 10 years ago, when Trump was first elected, and there would be disagreements within the movement about how best to achieve their goals.

But, in the hours following Vance's speech, Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America, an organization that works to elect pro-life candidates to office, issued a statement rebuking his assertion by pointing out the comparison "reveals a harsh reality."

"The clearest measure of whether the pro-life movement is winning or losing is the number of abortions occurring each year," said Marjorie Dannenfelser, the group's president. "According to the latest statistics, there are at least 1.1 million abortions occurring in America annually post-Roe. This compares to 874,000 abortions in 2016 — a 30% increase."

"Because of the indispensable role President Trump played in the overturning of Roe, we have the opportunity to save lives and serve women," she said. "But it is because of the inaction of the Trump-Vance administration on abortion drugs that this opportunity isn't being realized — and abortions are going up, not down."

The March for Life rally dais featured exclusively Republican political leaders, who touted their legislative accomplishments while criticizing Democratic lawmakers on abortion. No identifiable pro-life Democrats were among the rally's featured speakers — a visible departure from March for Life rallies of previous years.

Among those accomplishments were two pieces of legislation that passed in the House of Representatives Jan. 21 and 22, and will be taken up by the Senate: The Pregnant Students' Rights Act, which would require colleges and universities that participate in federal student aid programs to provide both prospective and current students with information on rights and resources for carrying a baby to term while enrolled, and The Supporting Pregnant and Parenting Women and Families Act.

The latter bill would allow states to use low-income support funds for pregnancy centers that support protecting the life of the mother and her unborn child, and that offer services such as pregnancy testing, prenatal and pregnancy education, counseling, diapers, baby clothes and other material resources.

Pro-life Democrats, in partnership with Rehumanize International and the Consistent Life Network, did have their own event at the National Press Club in Washington before the March for Life, unfolding their own legislative vision called the "Legislating for Human Dignity" campaign. Among the policy propo-

sals the group backs was the Supporting Healthy Moms and Babies Act, a bipartisan initiative with draft legislation introduced in both the House and Senate that would make birth free — eliminating cost-sharing for prenatal care, labor and delivery, and postpartum care.

Shortly before the final prayer and sending off the thousands gathered to march and advocate for life, Lichter said she had a message from an early alumnus of the March for Life who could not be with them due to an overseas work commitment: Pope Leo XIV.

She read the pope's letter to the march's participants, imparting his papal blessing and assuring them "of

my spiritual closeness as you gather for this eloquent public witness to affirm that the protection of the right to life constitutes the indispensable foundation of every other human right."

After the final prayer, marchers — armed with a variety of signs with pro-life slogans — exited the rally space on the National Mall to walk through Washington's streets to the steps of the Supreme Court building.

(Peter Jesserer Smith is the national news editor for OSV News. Julie Asher, Loretta Brown, Marietha Gón-gora V., Kurt Jensen, Kate Scanlon, Maria Wiering and Katie Yoder contributed to this report.)


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Catholic Schools Week Celebrations of Faith, Service, and Fun Not Hindered by Snow



Although the majority of the diocese's Catholic schools were canceled during Catholic Schools Week in the aftermath of the Jan. 25 snowstorm, celebrations of faith, service, and fun were not hindered. Clockwise, from top left: Father Casey Mahone and students from St. Mary Central Catholic School in Clarksburg gather after Mass Jan. 24 to kick off Catholic Schools Week; Fairmont Catholic School first-graders sing "Jesus Is My Best Friend" during Mass at St. Peter the Fisherman Parish in Fairmont; pre-k at Corpus Christi School in Wheeling bring the cold inside for fun with the wheel and snow Jan. 29; a Wheeling Central Catholic High School student shovels snow for a neighbor (although Central was canceled that day, students served their community by shoveling snow for those in need); and Agustin Seamon, a fifth grader at St. Mary's in Clarksburg, shows the information flyers for his school and Clarksburg's Notre Dame High School that he shared at Mass at All Saints Parish in Bridgeport Jan. 24. *Courtesy photos*



We Are Not Created for Algorithms, but Human Encounter, Pope Leo Says In Programmatic Message On AI

By **Paulina Guzik**

(OSV News) — Pope Leo XIV didn't just write his first message as pontiff for World Communications Day Jan. 24. He wrote a programmatic document on artificial intelligence in response to the challenges of the modern world, just like Pope Leo XIII faced the industrial revolution more than a century before.

While the 60th World Communications Day will be observed on May 17, the text, published Jan. 24 on the feast of St. Francis de Sales, patron saint of the Catholic press, offers a stark warning: AI and digital technologies are reshaping human communication, creativity and identity. And the greatest risks, the pope said, are not technical but deeply human.

If we fail in safeguarding and educating on how to use it, digital technology, Pope Leo said, "risks radically modifying some of the fundamental pillars of human civilization, which we sometimes take for granted."

By "simulating human voices and faces, wisdom and knowledge, awareness and responsibility, empathy and friendship, systems known as artificial intelligence not only interfere with information ecosystems, but also invade the deepest level of communication, that of relationships between human persons."

The challenge, therefore, the pontiff said "is not technological, but anthropological. Safeguarding faces and voices ultimately means safeguarding ourselves."

Pope Leo challenged AI with what technology cannot replace: a human face and a human voice, stressing that they matter. "They are described as unique expressions of a person's identity and the foundation of genuine human encounter," the pope said.

"They express one's unrepeatable identity and are the constitutive element of every encounter," Pope Leo said, adding that "face and voice are sacred" and were "given to us by God, who created us in his image and likeness, calling us to life with the Word that He himself addressed to us."

God's Word "first resounded through the centuries in the voices of the prophets and then became

flesh in the fullness of time," the pontiff reminded.

God "impressed upon the human face a reflection of divine love, so that humanity might fully live its own humanity through love," Pope Leo said. Therefore, "To safeguard human faces and voices" means to "safeguard this seal, this indelible reflection of God's love. We are not a species made up of biochemical algorithms, defined in advance. Each of us has an irreplaceable and inimitable vocation that emerges through life and is manifested precisely in communication with others."

Pope Leo, in his message, challenged humanity addicted to social media and driven by algorithms to not give up one's own thinking, empowering humans instead to use technology in order to assist, not drive, human life.

Algorithms, the pope warned, "reward quick emotions and instead penalize human expressions that require more time, such as the effort to understand and reflect."

They close people into "bubbles of easy consensus and easy indignation" and "weaken the capacity for listening and critical thinking and increase social polarization."

AI can provide support and assistance in managing communicative tasks, the pope indicated, in the long run however "avoiding the effort of one's own thinking" erodes "our cognitive, emotional, and communicative capacities," transforming people into "mere passive consumers of unthought thoughts, anonymous products, without authorship, without love — while the masterpieces of human genius in the fields of music, art, and literature are reduced to a mere training ground for machines."

"Giving up the creative process and handing over one's mental functions and imagination to machines" means "burying the talents we have received in order to grow as persons in relationship with God and with others. It means hiding our face and silencing our voice," Pope Leo underlined.

This message was not the first time Leo has spoken strongly about AI. In June, he sent a message to the

See "Pope" on Page 9



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Pope ...

Cont'd from Page 8

Second Annual Rome Conference on Artificial Intelligence, in which he voiced his "concern for children and young people, and the possible consequences of the use of AI on their intellectual and neurological development." Our youth "must be helped, and not hindered, in their journey towards maturity and true responsibility," Pope Leo stressed on June 17.

In November, he wrote to the Builders AI Forum, a worldwide conference in Rome, that their "deliberations over these two days illustrate that this work cannot be confined to research labs or investment portfolios. It must be a profoundly ecclesial endeavor."

In his Jan. 24 message, however, he delivered a mission statement and a call to action, saying "Technology that exploits our need for relationships can not only have painful consequences for the destiny of individuals, but can also damage the social, cultural, and political fabric of societies."

The challenge ahead of humanity "is not to stop digital innovation, but to guide it," the pope said, "to be aware of its ambivalent nature. It is up to each of us to raise our voices in defense of the human person, so that these tools may truly be integrated by us as allies."

This alliance is possible, the pontiff said, urging that it be founded on three pillars: "responsibility, cooperation, and education."

With this, Pope Leo chal-

lenged AI moguls and Silicon Valley.

"For those at the top of online platforms, this means ensuring that their business strategies are not driven solely by the criterion of profit maximization, but also by a far-sighted vision that takes the common good into account, in the same way that each of them cares about the good of their own children."

In November, as the conference "The Dignity of Children and Adolescents in the Age of Artificial Intelligence" was taking place, Pope Leo met Megan Garcia, an American mother whose son, Sewell Setzer III, died in February 2024 after an AI chatbot groomed him into suicide.

Garcia filed one of the first lawsuits out of many against an AI company after her son died in an ambulance after the chatbot encouraged him to take his own life.

In October, Character.AI announced it will bar users under 18 from its platform — a decision that took effect on Nov. 25.

Garcia told Rome Reports that she prayed during the conclave that the next pope would "recognize that the mission of the Church is threatened by unregulated AI."

Garcia and other parents can be encouraged by the pope's words in his Jan. 24 message.

"Creators and developers of AI models are called to transparency and social responsibility regarding the design principles and moderation systems underlying their algorithms and the models they develop, in order to foster informed

consent on the part of users," the pope wrote.

"The same responsibility is also demanded of national legislators and supranational regulators," he stressed, naming their primary task as ensuring "respect for human dignity."

"Adequate regulation can protect people from forming emotional bonds with chatbots and can curb the spread of false, manipulative, or misleading content, preserving the integrity of information against its deceptive simulation," Pope Leo said.

Addressing media and communications companies, he said: "Public trust is earned through accuracy and transparency, not by chasing engagement at any price."

Pope Leo wrote in his message that "Content generated or manipulated by AI must be clearly labeled and distinguished from content created by people," urging safeguarding of the authorship and "sovereign ownership of the work of journalists."

"A constructive and meaningful public service is not based on opacity, but on transparency of sources, inclusion of the parties involved, and a high standard of quality."

And for that, no one is stripped from responsibility, the pontiff urged.

"All of us are called to cooperate. No single sector can face alone the challenge of guiding digital innovation and the governance of AI."

All stakeholders, the pontiff said — "from the technology industry to legislators, from creative companies to the academic world, from artists

and journalists to educators" must be involved "in building and making effective a conscious and responsible digital citizenship."

"As Catholics, we can and must offer our contribution so that people — especially the young — acquire the capacity for critical thinking and grow in freedom of spirit," he urged.

"Just as the industrial revolution required basic literacy to enable people to respond to novelty," the digital revolution "requires digital literacy" — together with a humanistic and cultural education — "to understand how algorithms shape our perception of reality," and "how AI biases function."

Pope Leo specifically challenged Time Magazine's "Person of the Year" in his Jan. 24 message — who in 2025 were announced as "Architects of AI."

"Behind this enormous invisible force that involves us all, there are only a handful of companies — those whose founders have recently been presented as the creators of the 'Person of the Year 2025,'" Pope Leo said.

"This gives rise to serious concern regarding the oligopolistic control of algorithmic and artificial intelligence systems capable of subtly shaping behaviors and even rewriting human history — including the history of the Church — often without people being truly aware of it," he warned.

In August, Pope Leo XIV

was named to Time magazine's "Time 100 AI" list for 2025, recognized as one of the world's top "thinkers" shaping how humanity confronts artificial intelligence.

Time magazine said he has chosen a name "in part to meet a revolution: that of AI." The list includes "leaders," "innovators," "shapers" and the group Pope Leo has been listed in — "thinkers."

If Leo XIV continues to marshal the world's Catholics against AI's alienating potential, Time said, "Silicon Valley faces a formidable — and unexpected — spiritual counterweight."

Pope Leo's message for World Communications Day looks like a promise that the "thinker" will not disappoint.

(Paulina Guzik is international editor for OSV News.)

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Looking Back on Confirmation in Bancroft

On Wednesday, November 18, 2025, St. Patrick Mission, together with parishioners from the tri-parish (including Holy Trinity in Nitro and Christ the King in Dunbar), united in faith to celebrate the sacrament of confirmation at St. Patrick Church in Bancroft. Four candidates were confirmed: Malie Murphy, Isabella Nunley, Sophie Burdette, and Emma Burdette. Bishop Mark E. Brennan presided over the confirmation Mass with Father Chapin Engler, Jr., pastor, concelebrating. Deacon Dennis Nesser, J.C.L., was the deacon for the Mass. A light reception, prepared by the St. Patrick's Women's Guild, was held in the parish hall following confirmation.

Courtesy photo



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.



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No fuimos creados para los algoritmos, sino para el encuentro humano, afirma el Papa León en un mensaje sobre la IA

Por Paulina Guzik, OSV News (OSV News) — El Papa León XIV no solo escribió su primer mensaje como pontífice para la Jornada Mundial de las Comunicaciones el 24 de enero, sino que también redactó un documento programático sobre inteligencia artificial en respuesta a los desafíos del mundo moderno, al igual que, hace más de un siglo, el Papa León XIII se enfrentó a la revolución industrial.

Si bien la 60.ª Jornada Mundial de las Comunicaciones Sociales se celebrará el 17 de mayo, el texto, publicado el 24 de enero, festividad de San Francisco de Sales, patrón de la prensa católica, ofrece una seria advertencia: la inteligencia artificial y las tecnologías digitales están transformando la comunicación, la creatividad y la identidad humanas. Y los mayores riesgos, según el Papa, no son técnicos, sino profundamente humanos.

Si fallamos en su cuidado y no educamos sobre cómo utilizarla, la tecnología digital, afirmó el Papa León, "se corre el riesgo de modificar radicalmente algunos de los pilares fundamentales de la civilización humana, que a veces damos por descontado".

Al simular voces y rostros humanos, sabiduría y conocimiento, conciencia y responsabilidad, empatía y amistad, los sistemas conocidos como inteligencia artificial

no solo interfieren en los ecosistemas de información, sino que también invaden el nivel más profundo de la comunicación: el de las relaciones entre las personas.

El desafío, por lo tanto, afirmó el pontífice, "no es tecnológico, sino antropológico. Custodiar los rostros y las voces significa, en última instancia, cuidarnos a nosotros mismos".

El Papa León contrapuso a la inteligencia artificial aquello que la tecnología no puede reemplazar: un rostro humano y una voz humana, subrayando su importancia. "Son rasgos únicos, distintivos, de cada persona", dijo el Papa.

"Manifiestan su propia identidad irrepetible y son el elemento constitutivo de todo encuentro", afirmó el Papa León, añadiendo que "el rostro y la voz son sagrados" y nos fueron "dados por Dios, que nos ha creado a su imagen y semejanza, llamándonos a la vida con la Palabra que Él mismo nos ha dirigido".

La Palabra de Dios "resonó primero a través de los siglos en las voces de los profetas, y luego se hizo carne en la plenitud de los tiempos", recordó el pontífice.

Dios "ha impreso en su rostro un reflejo del amor divino, para que pueda vivir plenamente la propia humanidad mediante el amor", dijo el Papa León. "Por lo tanto, custodiar rostros y voces humanas"

significa "conservar este sello, este reflejo indeleble del amor de Dios. No somos una especie hecha de algoritmos bioquímicos definidos de antemano. Cada uno de nosotros tiene una vocación insustituible e inimitable que surge de la vida y que se manifiesta precisamente en la comunicación con los demás".

El Papa León, en su mensaje, desafió a la humanidad, adicta a las redes sociales y dominada por los algoritmos, a no renunciar al pensamiento propio, empoderando a los seres humanos para que utilicen la tecnología para apoyar, no para dirigir, la vida humana.

Los algoritmos, advirtió el Papa, "premio emociones rápidas y penalizan en cambio expresiones humanas que necesitan tiempo, como el esfuerzo por comprender y la reflexión".

Encierran a las personas en "burbujas de fácil consenso y fácil indignación" y "debilitan la capacidad de escucha y de pensamiento crítico y aumentan la polarización social".

La inteligencia artificial puede brindar apoyo y asistencia en la gestión de tareas comunicativas, indicó el Papa; sin embargo, a la larga, "eludir el esfuerzo de pensar por nosotros mismos" erosiona "nuestras capacidades cognitivas, emocionales y comunicativas", transformando a las personas en "meros consumidores pasivos de

pensamientos no pensados, de productos anónimos, sin autoría, sin amor. Mientras que las obras maestras del genio humano en el campo de la música, el arte y la literatura se reducen a un mero campo de entrenamiento para las máquinas".

"Renunciar al proceso creativo y ceder a las máquinas nuestras funciones mentales y nuestra imaginación" significa "enterrar los talentos que hemos recibido para crecer como personas en relación con Dios y con los demás. Significa ocultar nuestro rostro y silenciar nuestra voz", subrayó el Papa León.

Este mensaje no fue la primera vez que el Papa León se pronunció con firmeza sobre la inteligencia artificial. En junio, envió un mensaje a la Segunda Conferencia Anual de Roma sobre Inteligencia Artificial, en el que expresó su preocupación "por los niños y los jóvenes, y por las posibles consecuencias del uso de la inteligencia artificial en su desarrollo intelectual y neurológico".

"Hay que ayudar a nuestros jóvenes, y no obstaculizarles, en su camino hacia la madurez y la responsabilidad auténtica", subrayó el Papa León el 17 de junio.

En noviembre, escribió al Foro Builders AI, una conferencia mundial celebrada en Roma, que sus "deliberaciones durante estos dos días ilustran que este trabajo no

Continúa en la página 15

Para denunciar presuntos casos de abuso sexual de menores:

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Continuación de la página 14

puede limitarse a los laboratorios de investigación o a las carteras de inversión. Debe ser una labor profundamente eclesial".

Sin embargo, en su mensaje del 24 de enero, presentó una declaración de principios y un llamado a la acción, afirmando que "la tecnología que se aprovecha de nuestra necesidad de relacionarnos no solo puede tener consecuencias dolorosas para el destino de las personas, sino que también puede dañar el tejido social, cultural y político de las sociedades".

El desafío que tiene por delante la humanidad "no es el de detener la innovación digital sino el de guiarla", dijo el Papa, "y en ser conscientes de su carácter ambivalente. Corresponde a cada uno de nosotros alzar la voz en defensa de las personas humanas para que estos instrumentos puedan realmente ser integrados por nosotros como aliados".

Esta alianza es posible, afirmó el pontífice, e instó a que se fundamente en tres pilares: "responsabilidad, cooperación y educación".

Con estas palabras, el Papa León lanzó un desafío a los magnates de la inteligencia artificial y de Silicon Valley.

"Para quienes están en la cúspide de las plataformas online esto significa asegurarse de que las propias estrategias empresariales no estén guiadas por el único criterio del máximo beneficio, sino también por una visión de futuro que tenga en cuenta el bien común del mismo modo que cada uno de ellos se preocupa por el bienestar de sus hijos".

En noviembre, mientras se celebraba la conferencia "La dignidad de los niños y adolescentes en la era de la inteligencia artificial", el Papa León se reunió con Megan Garcia, una madre estadounidense cuyo hijo, Sewell Setzer III, falleció en febrero de 2024 después de

que un chatbot de inteligencia artificial lo incitara al suicidio.

García presentó una de las primeras demandas, de entre muchas otras, contra una empresa de inteligencia artificial después de que su hijo muriera en una ambulancia tras ser animado por el chatbot a quitarse la vida.

En octubre, Character.AI anunció que prohibiría el acceso a su plataforma a los usuarios menores de 18 años, una decisión que entró en vigor el 25 de noviembre.

García declaró a Rome Reports que durante el cónclave rezó para que el próximo pontífice "reconociera que la misión de la Iglesia está amenazada por la inteligencia artificial no regulada".

García y otros padres pueden sentirse alentados por las palabras del Papa en su mensaje del 24 de enero.

"A los creadores y programadores de modelos de la IA se les pide transparencia y responsabilidad social respecto a los principios de planificación y a los sistemas de moderación que están en la base de sus algoritmos y de los modelos diseñados con el fin de favorecer un consentimiento informado por parte de los usuarios", escribió el Papa.

"La misma responsabilidad se exige también a los legisladores nacionales y a las entidades reguladoras supranacionales", subrayó, señalando que su tarea principal es garantizar "el respeto a la dignidad humana".

"Una reglamentación adecuada puede proteger a las personas, de crear vínculos emocionales con los chatbots y contener la difusión de contenidos falsos, manipuladores o confusos, preservando la integridad de la información frente a una simulación engañosa de la misma", afirmó el Papa León.

Dirigiéndose a las empresas de medios de comunicación, afirmó: "La confi-

anza del público se gana con precisión y transparencia, no con la búsqueda de cualquier tipo de implicación".

El Papa León escribió en su mensaje que "los contenidos generados o manipulados por la IA deben señalarse y distinguirse claramente de los contenidos creados por personas", e instó a salvaguardar la autoría y la propiedad intelectual de la obra de los periodistas.

"Un servicio público constructivo y significativo no se basa en la opacidad, sino en la transparencia de las fuentes, la inclusión de las partes implicadas y un alto nivel de calidad".

Y por ello, nadie está exento de responsabilidad, insistió el pontífice.

"Todos estamos llamados a cooperar. Ningún sector puede afrontar por sí solo el desafío de guiar la innovación digital y la forma de gobernar la IA".

El pontífice afirmó que todas las partes interesadas --"desde la industria tecnológica a los legisladores, desde las empresas creativas al mundo académico, desde los artistas a los periodistas y a los educadores"-- deben participar "en construir y hacer efectiva una ciudadanía digital consciente y responsable".

"Como católicos, pode-

mos y debemos aportar nuestra contribución para que las personas, especialmente los jóvenes, adquieran la capacidad de pensar críticamente y crezcan en la libertad del espíritu", instó.

"Al igual que la revolución industrial exigía una alfabetización básica para que las personas pudieran reaccionar ante las novedades", la revolución digital "también requiere una alfabetización digital", junto con una educación humanística y cultural, "para comprender cómo los algoritmos modelan nuestra percepción de la realidad" y "cómo funcionan los prejuicios de la IA".

El Papa León cuestionó específicamente la elección de la "Persona del Año" de la revista Time en su mensaje del 24 de enero, que en 2025 fueron anunciados como los "Arquitectos de la IA".

"Detrás de esta enorme fuerza invisible que nos involucra a todos, hay solo un puñado de empresas, cuyos fundadores han sido recientemente presentados como los creadores de la 'persona del año 2025'", dijo el Papa León.

"Esto suscita una importante preocupación por el control del oligopolio de los sistemas algorítmicos y de inteligencia artificial capaces de orientar sutil-

mente los comportamientos e incluso reescribir la historia de la humanidad --incluida la historia de la Iglesia-- a menudo sin que nos demos cuenta realmente", advirtió.

En agosto, el Papa León XIV fue incluido en la lista "Time 100 AI" de la revista Time para 2025, siendo reconocido como uno de los principales "pensadores" del mundo que están influyendo en la forma en que la humanidad se enfrenta a la inteligencia artificial.

La revista Time afirmó que el Papa eligió su nombre "en parte para hacer frente a una revolución: la de la IA". La lista incluye a "líderes", "innovadores", "creadores de tendencias" y el grupo en el que se ha incluido al Papa León: "pensadores".

Si León XIV continúa movilizándolo a los católicos de todo el mundo contra el potencial alienante de la IA, según Time, "Silicon Valley se enfrentará a un contrapeso espiritual formidable e inesperado".

El mensaje del Papa León para la Jornada Mundial de las Comunicaciones parece una promesa de que este "pensador" no decepcionará.

(Paulina Guzik es la editora internacional de OSV News.)

La misa del Tercer Domingo del Tiempo Ordinario desde la iglesia de San Santiago el Mayor en CharlesTown, WV, se transmitirá el Domingo a las 7:30 pm por Radio Luz de Vida (www.rdo.to/WLOL2) y se podrá escuchar a la carta en www.LoLradio.org/HH.html.



Now is a good time for parishes and schools to plan ahead and order materials for **Lent '26 "Operation Rice Bowl."** This now fifty year old program is a major way for American Catholics to be part of the worldwide work of Catholic Relief Services, our bishops' sponsored international relief agency.

Rooted in the history of the Eucharistic Congress, **CRS Rice Bowl** invites Catholics and faith communities in the United States to encounter God and our global family throughout Lent by practicing the **pillars of prayer, fasting and almsgiving**. Lenten alms donated through CRS Rice Bowl support the work of CRS in more than 120 different countries each year. Twenty-five percent of donations to CRS Rice Bowl stay in the local diocese, supporting hunger and poverty alleviation efforts. Since its inception in 1975, CRS Rice Bowl has raised more than \$350 million. With drastic federal cuts in international humanitarian aid our support of CRS is even more critical.

Free materials for Lent '26 "Operation Rice Bowl" can now be ordered at:
<https://www.crsricebowl.org/order-crs-rice-bowl-materials>

These materials include:

1. The now iconic "mite boxes" to collect saving from fasting,
2. Prayer materials for each day of Lent,
3. Stories and photos about communities being served by our support of CRS and even recipes based on meals of those people.
4. Videos and printed materials suitable for use during announcements at Sunday mass and other gatherings.
5. Materials for various levels of student and university participation.

For more information about Catholic Relief Services: search CRS.org

Diocesan contact **Chad Carter**, Chancellor, at 304-233-0880
 or

Fr. Larry W. Dorsch, CRS Global Fellow,
 For guest homilist or program speaker: Phone 304-281-6503

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