

THE CATHOLIC

Spirit

A Statement from Bishop Brennan

January 2, 2024

Israel-Hamas War: a Second Look

International Cooperation Needed for Peace in the Middle East

Early in the Israel-Hamas War (October 17, 2023) I analyzed the conflict according to the traditional norms of the Catholic just war theory: 1.) a defensive war in response to armed aggression 2.) undertaken as the last resort 3.) with a reasonable prospect of success 4.) and likely not to cause worse evils than the one it wants to eliminate (this last criterion sometimes referred to as proportionality). I claim no infallibility for my analysis but it seemed clear to me that Israel was justified in attacking Hamas in Gaza in response to the brutal rape, murder and dismemberment of many hundreds of Israeli citizens.

As we begin the new year, I am still convinced that Israel has the right to so weaken Hamas that it can no longer pose a threat to the safety of the Israeli people. But, as I said in October, Israel's conduct of the war, including, to date, a fierce ground offensive, continued missile strikes and a sharp limitation on humanitarian aid to Gazan civilians, could backfire and cause worse evils than the one it sought to remove.

Sadly, it appears that this is happening. The toll in Gaza, mostly of non-combatants and including many women and children as confirmed by independent witnesses, is staggering: more than twenty thousand dead and thousands more injured. Some humanitarian aid is allowed but far less than people

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Pastoral Letter on the Elderly and Persons with Special Needs from Bishop Brennan

Continuing my recent series of letters on life issues, I turn now to how we, as a society and a Church, treat the elderly and persons with special needs. They, too, form part of the "seamless garment" whose hem is respect for the embodied life of the human being. What does our Catholic faith have to say about them?

For most of history, a people's elders have been held in high esteem, sought out for their wisdom and cher-

ished for their custody of the community's traditions. Handicapped persons, on the other hand, have more often been dismissed as a burden and judged incapable of contributing to the common good. Our Catholic faith agrees that elderly persons deserve great respect and have an important role to play in safeguarding a community's values but our faith also affirms the intrinsic worth of persons with special needs — handicapped or disabled —

and welcomes their participation in the life of the community.

Men and women of advanced age have played a major role in our Judeo-Christian tradition. Abraham and Sarah, childless for so many years, were promised a son by God. Their faith was tested but they trusted God and He made them fertile in their old age. Through Isaac, their son, and Jacob, his and Rebekah's, the whole people

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Bring Mary's Gratitude and Hope into the New Year, Pope Says

By Justin McLellan

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — On New Year's Eve, believers and non-believers alike give thanks for all they have received in the last 12 months and express their hopes for the coming year, but Christians are called to cultivate their gratitude and hope following the example of Mary, Pope Francis said.

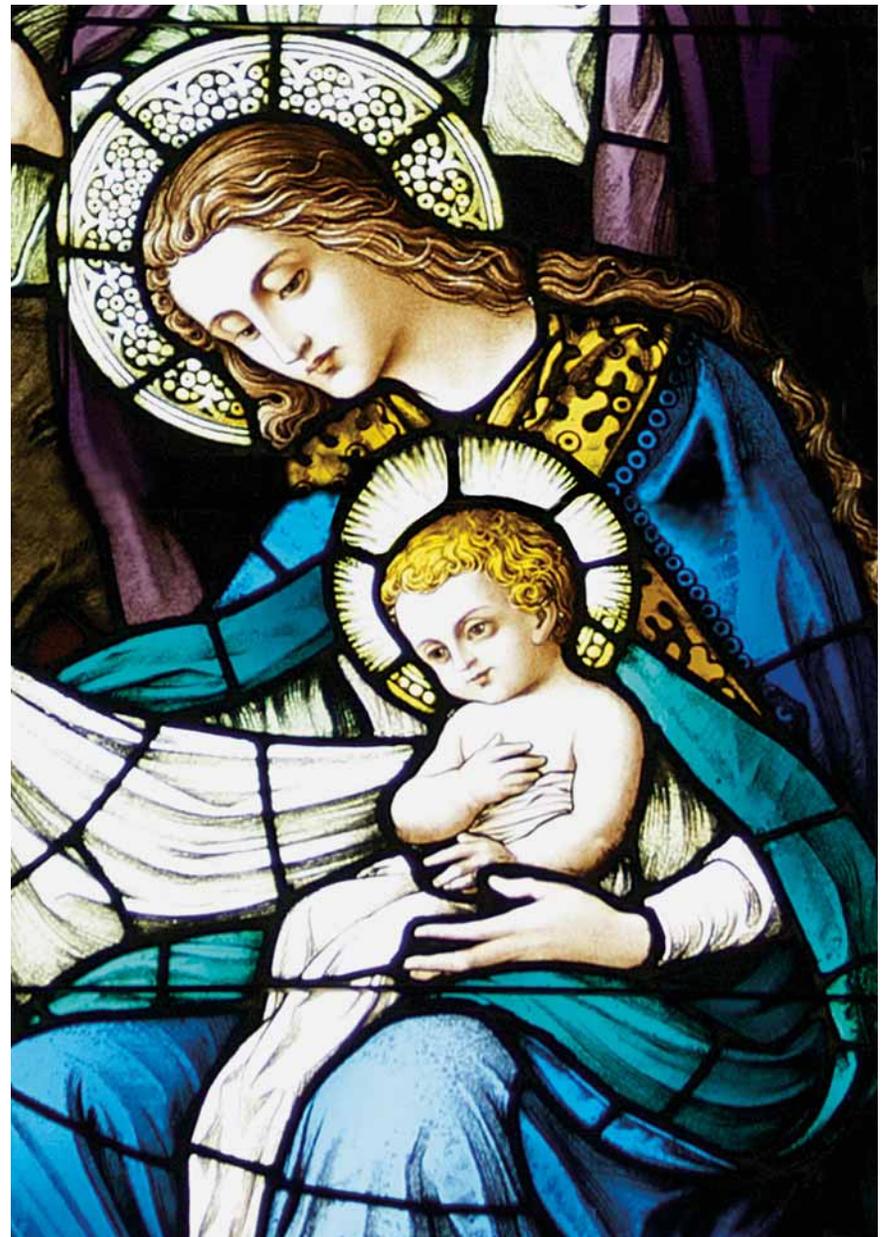
"Faith enables us to live this hour in a way different than that of a worldly mindset," the pope said during an evening prayer service in St. Peter's Basilica Dec. 31. "Faith in Jesus Christ, the incarnated God, born of the Virgin Mary, gives a new way of feeling time and life."

Pope Francis said that while many people express thanks and hope on New Year's Eve, in reality, they often

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Our Lady and the Christ Child are shown in this stained glass window at St. Alphonsus Church in Wheeling.

Colleen Rowan Photo



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need to eat and drink and hospitals need to treat the injured. Israel is losing support from its usual allies – even the United States is pressuring Israel to tone down its military offensive – and the prospects for a peaceful relationship with Palestinians and other Arabs is fading fast as hatred of Jews and resentment at Israel’s conduct of the war builds among the neighboring peoples. Anti-semitism is also rising in the United States and elsewhere.

How can Israeli forces crush Hamas while avoiding massive harm to civilians? It begins to look impossible. Since, as of this writing, Hamas is still sending missiles into Israel and is continuing to attack Israeli soldiers within Gaza, Hamas has not yet been defeated militarily. With its strategy of mingling with civilians, hiding in tunnels and holding hostages as a bargaining chip,

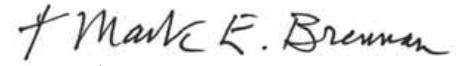
Hamas may be able to fight for a long time. Israel, on the other hand, by forcing more and more Gazans into smaller and smaller spaces, only increases the likelihood of greater civilian casualties. (The charge of genocide is false. If killing Palestinians were Israel’s aim, it could start with the more than one million living within Israel. The dead and injured Gazan civilians are the massive “collateral damage” of Israel’s vigorous pursuit of Hamas terrorists.)

The Israeli government is under increasing pressure from within Israel to make deals for the release of Israeli hostages but shows no sign yet of budging. I have seen no indication that Gazan civilians are demanding that Hamas stop fighting – there would likely be repercussions if they did. Egypt, which refuses to open its borders to fleeing Gazans, has offered a peace plan but so far the two hostile parties have not accepted it. Who will govern Gaza and who will pay for it to be rebuilt? There are international actors, especially Iran

and its allies, who seek to use the conflict to further their own interests.

Israel’s initial response to Hamas’ October 7 attack was just; its current conduct of the war is causing greater evils than the one it seeks to eliminate. It should allow far more humanitarian aid into Gaza under strict controls and agree to stop fighting if the United Nations will send in a peace-keeping force to prevent Hamas from attacking Israel again. An international conference should also be convened to work out a solution of the whole Palestinian situation, the security of Israel and a just peace in the Middle East. May God enlighten and strengthen local and international leaders and their peoples to discover the path forward.

Sincerely in Christ,



+Mark E. Brennan
Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston



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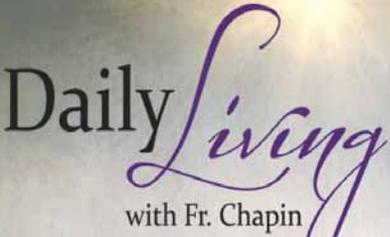


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Sexual Abuse Awareness Training

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops requires all Dioceses/Eparchies have a Safe Environment Program for the protection of children and young people. In accordance with these requirements, the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston’s Safe Environment Program consists of the following components for persons seeking employment or to volunteer, directly or indirectly, with children: background check; receipt of the Diocese’s Policy Relating to Sexual Abuse of Children; and sexual abuse awareness training for adults. Sexual abuse awareness training may be completed online or via live workshop. For more information, go to www.dwc.org, click “Diocese”, then “Offices,” then “Office of Safe Environment.”

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.reportbishop-abuse.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.reportbishop-abuse.org. **To Report to Civil Authorities: Contact your local law enforcement:** numbers will vary based on your location. If you believe someone is in immediate danger, call 911. To confidentially report any incidence of suspected child abuse or neglect, including sexual abuse, contact the West Virginia Bureau for Children and Families’ Child Protective Services by calling the Child Abuse Hotline at 800.352.6513. You may report anonymously to this hotline if you prefer. **To Report to Diocesan Authorities:** The diocese encourages reporting to the appropriate civil authorities first and foremost if a crime has been committed. The diocese also encourages reporting to the appropriate church authorities. To report suspected cases of sexual abuse of children by personnel of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston to the Diocese, contact one of the following designees at 1.888.434.6237 or 304.233.0880: Mr. Bryan Minor, ext. 263; Mr. Tim Bishop, ext. 353; or Very Rev. Dennis Schuelkens, Jr., V.E., ext. 270; or Sr. Martha Gomez, ext. 264. You may also call the Diocese’s Office of Safe Environment at 304.230.1504. You may also call the Diocese’s sexual abuse hotline at 833.230.5656. Additional methods of reporting are available at www.dwc.org, under “Accountability.” Complaint forms are available online at www.dwc.org, click “Diocese” on the menu bar, then “Offices,” then “Safe Environment”, then “Download Files and Forms.” The form is titled “Complaint Form for Allegations of Sexual Abuse of a Minor.” The form may be returned via U.S. mail to: Office of Safe Environment, Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, PO Box 230, Wheeling WV 26003. **To Report to the Diocese’s Victim Assistance Coordinator:** please call Erin McFarland, M.Ed., LPC, at 304.559.6742. In addition to the methods listed above for reporting sexual abuse, the Diocese also has partnered with Navex Global to offer the EthicsPoint platform to report other, additional concerns, such as suspected financial, professional, and personal misconduct of a priest, deacon, religious, or lay employee of the Diocese or any Catholic parish or school in West Virginia. The EthicsPoint platform can be accessed via www.dwc.org, under “Accountability”, then “Report Misconduct” or by calling 844.723.8381. EthicsPoint is a third-party reporting system that reports to civil authorities where applicable and Diocesan authorities, and the identity of the person reporting is protected. Links and information: WV Department of Health and Human Resources: https://www.wvdhhr.org/report.asp. West Virginia State Police, Crimes Against Children Unit: 304-293-6400.



Daily Living
with Fr. Chapin

Sunday Mornings

6:30 WTOV FOX 9	Wheeling-Steubenville
6:30 WOWK CBS 13	Huntington-Charleston
8:00 WBOY NBC 12	Weston-Clarksburg-Fairmont
6:30 WOAY ABC 4	Beckley-Bluefield-Oak Hill (Lewisburg)
8:30 WVNS FOX 59	Beckley-Bluefield-Oak Hill (Lewisburg)
9:30 WVVA NBC 6	Beckley-Bluefield-Oak Hill (Lewisburg)
11:00 WDVM 25	Hagerstown-Washington D.C.

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Letter...

Cont'd from Page 1

of Israel descended. At the beginning of New Testament times, Zachariah and Elizabeth were old and childless but God gave them a son, John, who prepared the way for our Savior, Jesus Christ. Old Simeon and Anna prophesied about Jesus' saving mission when Mary and Joseph brought the child to present him to the Lord in the temple in Jerusalem.

Non-Christian cultures have also revered the elderly. When I was the parish priest for a Korean Catholic congregation just outside Washington, DC, I saw on display the centuries-old Korean custom of profound esteem for their elders (*sinbunim*). Younger Koreans would make a deep bow before the *sinbunim* and their views were accorded much respect. The parish built a retirement home for the elderly parishioners, so important were they to the Korean community.

Today in the United States there is a fascination with youthfulness that undermines our respect for the elderly. I am not referring to young people themselves, who are a treasure and whose participation in community life we must foster. I refer, rather, to adults seeking to look and act as if they were many years younger than they actually are. We elders (I am a *sinbunim* now) should "act our age" and fulfill the role that is proper to our stage of life. That role continues to be to serve as guardians of our community's most cherished values and to pass on to the young the wisdom those values express. With respect to how the young view the elderly, I remember a mantra popular when I was in college: "Don't trust

anyone over thirty." Even at twenty, I thought that was silly. Our professors were all over thirty! I would hope that most young people would feel confident in seeking the guidance that older people can offer them and trust that it is offered out of a genuine concern for their good.

A major concern of elderly persons is for their safety and overall wellbeing. Many of them prefer to remain in their own homes and can do so with appropriate help from their grown children and home-care services. Others are better served by assisted living situations or nursing homes. These decisions require prudence by the elderly themselves and by their families. In any case, the elderly should not be neglected or simply warehoused. Their needs can be met and their contributions can be received if we remember that they are still part of us. Pastors should arrange for homebound parishioners to be visited and parishes should organize teams to visit in local nursing homes.

In the Catholic Church more than in American society at large we respect the role of elders. Most bishops are past middle age but remain active and deeply committed to the spiritual good of their people. Pope Francis turned eighty-seven on December 17, 2023, yet continues to serve the Church. Many of our parishes depend on older parishioners to fill their pastoral and finance councils and other organizations. When new to the Diocese I needed a vicar general – the bishop's special assistant, whom canon law requires to be a priest — so I turned to a retired priest, Msgr. Gene Ostrowski, and asked him for one year of service. He gave me three and a half. When I fi-

nally let him resume retirement, I asked another retired priest, Msgr. Joe Peterson, to take the position. He, too, graciously accepted. I can assure you that these generous men have given me wise counsel and undertaken important tasks for the good of our people.

Ominous clouds are gathering on the horizon for elderly Americans. Assisted suicide is now legal in ten states and the District of Columbia. Other countries show us where legalizing assisted suicide can lead. Canada allows both physician-assisted suicide and direct euthanasia. It applies not only to those whose death from a foreseeable, irremediable condition is near but also to those who suffer from chronic disabilities which are manageable but whose treatment the disabled person does not want. Canadian law will soon allow assisted suicide and euthanasia for mental illnesses. Belgium and the Netherlands allow minors to be euthanized at their request if they suffer from severe, incurable illnesses. The Netherlands allows doctors to euthanize patients with severe dementia without their consent. As Baby Boomers age in the US, the pressure to legalize assisted suicide will increase; the government will save money on Medicare and Medicaid and families will look forward to what their elderly relatives leave them.

What does the Catholic faith say about this? Our moral teaching prohibits us from directly intending or causing death but allows and encourages treatments meant to alleviate pain, even if those treatments might hasten death. Catholic teaching also allows a person to forego invasive and unpleasant treatments – formerly called "ex-

traordinary means" – especially if they have no reasonable prospect of success. The Catholic approach to dying is humane and respectful of the person's God-given dignity, whereas assisted suicide capitulates to despair and direct euthanasia violates the most basic tenet of medicine: "Do no harm."

In contrast to assisted suicide and direct euthanasia, hospice and palliative care are positive responses to end-of-life challenges. The hospice movement began as a way to provide terminally ill persons with a safe and caring environment in which to live their last months and days before they died of natural causes. Every effort is made to keep the dying person comfortable and as pain-free as possible. Even more importantly, family members and friends are encouraged to visit the dying person to alleviate the fear of being alone, which can be a heavier burden than physical pain. It is lamentable that hospices in some states are now required to participate in assisted suicide and that some hospice personnel support it.

What about persons with special needs? (I use that term because the words "handicapped" and "disabled" refer only to the lack of some ability; we all have needs, so people with special needs are different only in degree and kind.) American society is better now at accommodating persons with special needs, especially since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. The ubiquitous ramps and sloping sidewalks at street corners are visible signs of the Act's impact; so is the publicity given to the Special Olympics. Medical science has enabled the physically and intellectually handicapped to participate in school and

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Special collection for the Holy Land

at Masses in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston Jan. 13-14

"The money collected will be sent to **The Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA)**, a papal agency for humanitarian and pastoral support. They will provide the essentials of water, food, and emergency kits on the ground in the Holy Land. CNEWA has offices in the region and know where and what kind of help is needed the most." — *Bishop Mark Brennan*



Your donation can save a life.

CNEWA's Emergency Relief Fund to provide the essentials of water, food and emergency kits on the ground in the Holy Land.

Learn more about CNEWA at <https://cnewa.org>

Letter...

Cont'd from Page 3

work programs and let their gifts shine. Those who were once considered useless make their contribution to the common good. Simple changes can make a big difference. For example, many Catholic churches provide access to persons in wheelchairs, some have large-print missalettes for the sight-impaired, radio-transmitted sound for the hearing impaired and signed Masses for the deaf.

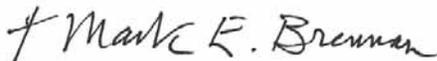
Despite these advances, there is still a bias against persons judged to be less than "perfect." In the United States pre-natal ultrasound screening has resulted in between 60% and 90% of unborn children diagnosed with Downs Syndrome being aborted. In France, the reported rate is 77%, in Denmark 90% and in Iceland almost 100%. Yet Downs Syndrome children, who once had a life expectancy of ten years, can now expect to live fifty years. Medical advances, special education classes and sheltered workplaces allow them to lead fulfilled lives. Studies show that they are just as happy as other people. But many parents today think it will be an intolerable burden to care for them. I know it can be hard at the beginning, because I have walked with families into which a special needs child was born but I have also seen the love that blossoms in such families once they embrace that new child. The child and the whole family learn to give and receive love.

Here our Catholic Church could shine! The early Christians picked up babies left to die of exposure or by attacks of wild animals, and took them home to raise. Could we not make it known that we will take in children with special needs when their parents cannot raise them? Are they not made in God's image like the rest of us? Could this not become a religious order's priority in today's society?

In a less dramatic vein, now that we can get handicapped persons into our churches, can we invite them to be readers and Extraordinary Ministers, according to their abilities? Could they not serve on parish pastoral councils and finance councils? I knew a blind man who was ordained a priest in my first diocese; we hope to have a blind deacon in ours. My point is: let's invite persons with special needs to take part as fully in the life of our parishes, schools and organizations as possible. Not only will they benefit from their service but the rest of us, who may think we have no handicaps, will learn that it is not necessary to be "perfect" physically and mentally to be fully human and serve God's people.

Just as we should cherish and protect children, born and unborn, so we should cherish and foster the wellbeing of our elders and persons with special needs. We must forge bonds that transcend age and physical and mental boundaries. We must reject policies and practices that judge some people as disposable based on criteria that others decide. A person's fundamental worth does not depend on his or her age or physical or intellectual abilities; it comes from being a creature made in God's image and likeness. That is the bond that unites us all. May we recognize more fully that our love of neighbor must extend to those who are advanced in age and those who live with special needs.

Sincerely in Christ,



+Mark E. Brennan
Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston

Mary...

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"lack the essential dimension which is that of relationship with the Other and with others, with God and with brothers and sisters."

With a worldly mentality, gratitude and hope are "flattened onto the self, onto one's interests," he said. "They don't go beyond satisfaction and optimism."

Pope Francis encouraged Christians to look to the example of Mary who, after giving birth to Jesus, had a mother's gratitude in her heart for bearing the child of God.

"Mystery makes room for gratitude, which surfaces in the contemplation of gift, in gratuitousness, while it suffocates in the anxiety of having and appearing," the pope said. "The church

learns gratitude from the Virgin Mary." The pope said that the hope of Mary and the church "is not optimism, it is something else: it is faith in a God faithful to his promises."

"This faith takes the form of hope in the dimension of time," he said. "Christians, like Mary, are pilgrims of hope."

Near the basilica's main altar was an icon of the "Madonna Lactans," or Nursing Madonna, from the Benedictine Abbey of Montevirgine in Mercogliano, Italy. The icon, in late Byzantine style, shows Mary nursing the infant Jesus. The pope prayed silently before the image before leaving the basilica. The service culminated with the choir and the 6,500 people present in the basilica singing the "Te Deum" ("We praise you, oh God") in thanksgiving for the blessings of the past year.

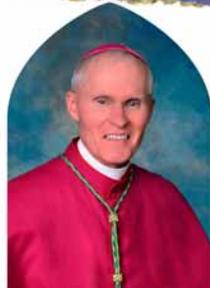
Pilgrimage

to the

National Eucharistic Congress

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A message from Bishop Mark Brennan on the National Eucharistic Congress

"It is going to be invigorating to see the faithful of WV at the National Eucharistic Congress representing their local parishes. I'm happy we are partnering with Corporate Travel, a Catholic company that specializes in Catholic pilgrimages, to ease the travel logistics burden for us."

-Bishop Brennan

Tour Inclusions

- NEC Congress Pass (5 Days)
- Four (4) nights' accommodations in or near Indianapolis
- Continental breakfast daily (pending hotel assignment)
- Roundtrip transportation from West Virginia to Indianapolis via deluxe motorcoach
- Daily transportation from hotel to the Indianapolis Convention Center and Lucas Oil Stadium
- Gratuities payable to motorcoach drivers

Tour Does Not Include

- Meals and beverages not specifically identified
- Items not specifically mentioned above



3 Step Registration Process (Registration opens Jan. 13-14)

1. Scan the QR Code on the cover of the flyer or click [HERE](#) to access our online registration site.
2. Follow the prompts to enter your personal information, select your rooming configuration, enter payment information, and acknowledge our terms and conditions.
3. Upon completion, you will receive a confirmation email with your diocesan code and a video tutorial providing instructions for finalizing your registration on the official National Eucharistic Congress' website.



Payment Schedule:
\$750 per person deposit due upon registration
Remaining balance due April 17, 2024

All payments are non-refundable. By registering for this tour, you understand and agree to CTS Terms and Conditions and accept our CTS Liability Release. All cancellations must be received in writing.

Travel Insurance: The Archdiocese and CTS strongly encourage passengers to purchase CFAR (Cancel for Any Reason) travel insurance. See Travel Insured link: www.travelinsured.com/agency?agency=47907&p=CTS21



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St. Patrick's in Weston Invites Faithful to 40-Hours Devotion

By Joyce Bibey

Father Doug Ondeck and the parishioners of St. Patrick Parish in Weston, invite the faithful from around the diocese to join with them for 40 Hours of Devotion & Eucharistic Adoration from Jan. 12-14.

For those who are not familiar with Adoration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, it is when the Eucharist is taken out of the tabernacle and exposed on the altar for private, personal prayer. It's a very peaceful time to bring your concerns and cares before our Lord and deepen your relationship with God.

Why 40 hours? The time is honoring the traditional 40-hours the Lord's Body rested in the tomb, and now truly present for us in the Eucharist.

Think of it as a time to come before Christ pouring out challenges, fears, failures, adversity, sorrows, joys, gratitude, and hope for the future. Adoration is time to talk to God, grow in holiness, and draw closer to Him before the Blessed Sacrament.

It is important to sign up for a

time slot, in order for the parish to know someone is always in the church and present with the Blessed Sacrament. The parish is looking for at least two people per time slot. However, even if you cannot commit to a time slot, and you find the opportunity to stop into the church during the Jan. 12-14 Adoration, please do and pray with us for as long as you can.

Those in Weston may sign up after Mass in the back of church or e-mail Mike Brumley at brumleyma@gmail.com.

St. Patrick's has the distinction of being one of the diocese's first parishes. A Catholic presence had been established in Weston by 1820 for the many Irish and German immigrants who constructed the Staunton to Parkersburg Turnpike. The original church was completed in 1848. Then, to accommodate a growing Catholic population, a larger structure was built in 1878 only to be replaced 36 years later, in 1914 with the current stately stone church located on Center Avenue in Weston.

The schedule framing the event is shown at right.

Priesthood Discernment Retreats to be Held in March

By Colleen Rowan

Men who feel a possible call to priesthood are invited to two upcoming discernment retreats. Presented by the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston's Vocations Office, the retreats will offer time for men 18 and older to prayerfully discern God's call in their lives and learn more about the priesthood and seminary life.

The first retreat will be the weekend of March 1-3 at Priest Field Pastoral Center in Kearneysville led by Father Brian Crenwelge, director of Vocations who also serves as pastor of St. John University Parish in Morgantown.

The second Discernment Retreat will be held March 10-11 at Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Md., and will be led by Father Phillip Szabo, who serves as parochial vicar at St. John's.

This second retreat, Father Crenwelge said, will give men two options to choose from or they can also attend both.

This second gathering will be the first discernment retreat the diocese's Vocations Office has held at a

seminary since 2019. Retreatants will have time for prayer, the chance to meet with seminarians, and attend classes with West Virginia's seminarians. The men on this retreat will also hear from Father Szabo and seminarians who will share their experiences and give talks on priestly life and discernment.

"Father Szabo has a love for vocations and wanted to help promote them in our diocese," Father Crenwelge said, adding that visiting a seminary can really help men in their discernment.

"I think it's important for men to visit a seminary," he said, "because often times they have little to no knowledge of what a seminarian's life is like. It's also important for discerning men to meet the seminarians and learn their stories. I think a man can really benefit by praying in the seminary chapel and asking the Lord if he wants him to be there one day."

For more information or to apply for the retreats, e-mail Father Szabo at pszabo@dwc.org or scan the QR code in the ad at the bottom right of this page.



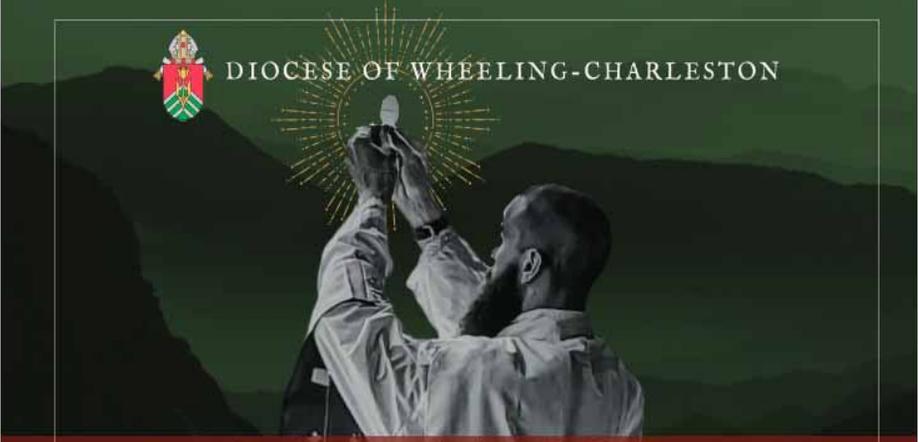
40 Hours of Devotion
 January 12-14, 2024
 St. Patrick Church, Weston WV
All are welcome to join us!

Friday, January 12:
 6:00 PM—Exposition and Vespers with Preached Homily
 9:30 PM—Chanted Compline followed by Simple Reposition

Saturday, January 13:
 7:00 AM Exposition
 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, January 14
 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

Sign up in the back of Church for your hour(s) to be with Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. You may also sign up via email Mike Brumley at brumleyma@gmail.com.



DIOCESE OF WHEELING-CHARLESTON

PRIESTHOOD Discernment Retreat

- FOR MEN 18 AND OLDER
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- HEAR TALKS ABOUT PRIESTLY LIFE AND DISCERNMENT

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TO APPLY, CONTACT FR. PHILLIP SZABO AT [PSZABO@DWC.ORG](mailto:pszabo@dwc.org) TO ARRANGE A TIME FOR A BRIEF PHONE INTERVIEW.



Wheeling's MLK Celebration Weekend Will Feature Two Religious Services and a Discussion at Wheeling University

WHEELING — Wheeling's annual Martin Luther King observation will include two faith services as part of the four-day celebration—a Shabbat Service on Friday, Jan. 12, at Temple Shalom and an Interfaith Prayer Service on Sunday, Jan. 14, at Wayman AME Church.

The Shabbat Service will be conducted by Rabbi Joshua Lief at 7 p.m. at Temple Shalom, 23 Bethany Pike, Wheeling. The Interfaith Prayer Service will begin at 6 p.m. at Macedonia Baptist Church, 105-12th Street, Wheeling.

All are welcome.

This year's MLK Celebration also includes a 1 p.m. discussion for high school and college students at Wheeling University's Troy Theater on Saturday, Jan. 13, and children's programming at Laughlin Memorial Chapel on Monday, Jan. 15.

The MLK March will begin at 2:15 p.m., Sunday, Jan. 14, at the Windmill atop Martin Luther King Boulevard. It will be followed by an awards presentation at 3:15 p.m. at West Virginia Northern Community College B&O Auditorium at 1704 Market Street, and a dinner immediately afterwards at the college's Multi-Purpose Room at 10-17th Street.

Details are available on the Wheeling MLK Celebration Facebook Page at <https://www.facebook.com/mlkjrwheeling>.

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Bridgeport's All Saints Choir Invited to Sing at Historic Washington Church



Courtesy Photo

All Saints Choir of All Saints Parish in Bridgeport performs at St. Augustine Catholic Church in Washington, D.C.

WASHINGTON — The All Saints Choir of All Saints Parish in Bridgeport was invited to sing on Nov. 12 at St. Augustine Catholic Church in Washington, D.C.

The historic church was celebrating 165 years as a parish and 46 years of its well-known gospel choir. It is the official African American parish for the nation's capital.

All Saints Choir sang for Mass with St. Augustine's large gospel choir and then for a 5 p.m. concert.

The anniversary concert was composed of four choirs that sang individually, then, the evening culminated with all the choirs singing together.

Choirs from the D.C. area that participated were: Favor of St. Martin of Tours Catholic Church,

Holy Comforter-St. Cyprian Catholic Church Choir, St. Luke's Catholic Church Gospel Choir, and St. Augustine Choir.

All Saints Choir performed four songs: "Cantate Domino" by Father James Chepponis; and "Nzamuraza" ("I Will Praise Christ, There is No One Like Christ"), a traditional song from Mozambique sung in the language of Xitswa. Both songs were done A Cappella.

The choir continued with two additional original songs by Stephen Pishner: "Song of Justice, Love, and Mercy" based on a scripture passage from Micah and the Corporal Works of Mercy. The choir ended with "Let Us Dream," a song based on a recent writing of Pope Francis.

The evening was filled with "roof-lifting" music of praise to God.

Father Walter Jagela, pastor of All Saints, was asked to open the evening with prayer.

Father Patrick Smith, the pastor there, closed the evening with a thank-you to all and a final prayer and sending forth blessing.

The concert, titled "Evergreen, The Psalm Experience," can be found on the St. Augustine Catholic Church, Washington DC YouTube page, under its LIVE Videos section. The link address for the video is: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OBcNo171V4k&tt=514s>

St. Augustine Parish hopes to host another event like this in the future.



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AI Must Serve Human Potential, Not Compete Against It, Pope Says

By Carol Glatz

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — All forms of artificial intelligence should be used to alleviate human suffering, promote integral development and help end wars and conflicts, not increase inequality and injustice in the world, Pope Francis said in his message for World Peace Day 2024.

“Artificial intelligence ought to serve our best human potential and our highest aspirations, not compete with them,” the pope said in his message for the Jan. 1 commemoration.

The message, “Artificial Intelligence and Peace,” was addressed to all men and women in the world, and in particular to heads of state and government and the leaders of the different religions and civil society. It was released Dec. 14 at a Vatican news conference.

The pope’s message highlighted the “need to strengthen or, if necessary, to establish bodies charged with examining the ethical issues arising in this field and protecting the rights of those who employ forms of artificial intelligence or are affected by them.”

The impact of any form of artificial intelligence “depends not only on its technical design, but also on the aims and interests of its owners and developers, and on the situations in which it will be employed,” he said.

Positive outcomes “will only be achieved if we show ourselves capable of acting responsibly and respect such fundamental human values as ‘inclusion, transparency, security, equity, privacy and reliability,’” the pope added.

The huge advances in new information technologies, he said, “offer exciting opportunities and grave risks, with serious implications for the pursuit of justice and harmony among peoples.”

Many urgent questions need to be asked, he added, including, “What will be the consequences, in the medium and long term, of these new digital technol-

ogies? And what impact will they have on individual lives and on societies, on international stability and peace?”

Pope Francis said, “We need to be aware of the rapid transformations now taking place and to manage them in ways that safeguard fundamental human rights and respect the institutions and laws that promote integral human development.”

Cardinal Michael Czerny, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, told reporters at the Vatican Dec. 14 that “like any other product of human ingenuity, artificial intelligence is acceptable if it serves the common good, protects the inalienable value of the human person and promotes fundamental rights.”

“Artificial intelligences already exert huge influence and will increasingly do so,” the cardinal said, “but we do not know where AI will take us in politics and commerce, culture and the environment and so on, so everyone needs to be better informed about developments as they occur, to speak up and take responsibility.”

In his message, the pope pinpointed specific technologies and advancements in the world of artificial intelligence that require urgent attention and oversight such as: machine or deep learning; surveillance systems; social credit or ranking systems; and lethal autonomous weapons systems or LAWS.

The weaponization of artificial intelligence through LAWS, he said, “is a cause for grave ethical concern. Autonomous weapon systems can never be morally responsible subjects,” and so “it is imperative to ensure adequate, meaningful and consistent human oversight of weapon systems.”

Nations are responsible for regulating AI at home and “international organizations can play a decisive role in reaching multilateral agreements and co-

ordinating their application and enforcement,” Pope Francis said, calling on the global community of nations to work together to adopt “a binding international treaty that regulates the development and use of artificial intelligence in its many forms.”

Regulation should aim not only at preventing harmful practices but also at encouraging best practices, he added.

Fundamentally, he said, in a world of seemingly limitless technological possi-

bilities, people risk falling prey to a “technocratic system,” which “allies the economy with technology and privileges the criterion of efficiency, tending to ignore anything unrelated to its immediate interests.”

“In an obsessive desire to control everything, we risk losing control over ourselves,” he said. “In the quest for an absolute freedom, we risk falling into the spiral of a ‘technological dictatorship.’”

“Inspired by a Promethean presumption of self-

sufficiency, inequalities could grow out of proportion, knowledge and wealth accumulate in the hands of a few, and grave risks ensue for democratic societies and peaceful coexistence,” he said.

Barbara Caputo, a professor of computer engineering and artificial intelligence at the Turin Polytechnical University, told reporters at the Vatican news conference that while AI isn’t new, what is different today is the amount of

See “Pope” on Page 8

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR THE 57th WORLD DAY OF PEACE

01 JANUARY 2024

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But we need to be aware of the rapid transformations now taking place and to manage them in ways that safeguard fundamental human rights and respect the institutions and laws that promote integral human development and the growth of a world of peace.

INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Artificial Intelligence and Peace
WORLD DAY OF PEACE 2024

Pope...

Cont'd from Page 7
information collected on individuals and "the concentration of resources" in so few hands.

The concentration of data, human talent, economic resources and computer capabilities in the hands of fewer entities means that profit will be their only or overriding motive, she said. "The pope reminds us with his message that artificial intelligence is made by people for people, and it must go back to being for everyone so it can really be an instrument for

peace."

She supported the pope's call in his message for adequate education and methods of training.

"We must commit ourselves to ensuring quality technical training in artificial intelligence for all young women and men, all over the world, who wish to put their talents to use in this discipline, with dedication and enthusiasm," she said.

The more "authoritative technical voices" there are from all over the world, she said, the more they can bring "the richness of their experience, history and culture to the

technical development of the artificial intelligence to come."

Pope Francis said he hoped his message "will encourage efforts to ensure that progress in developing

forms of artificial intelligence will ultimately serve the cause of human fraternity and peace. It is not the responsibility of a few but of the entire human family."

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Christian Persecution on the Rise Globally, but Overlooked, Says Expert

By **Gina Christian**

(OSV News) — Data shows that Christian persecution is on the rise globally — but that repression remains largely overlooked in the news cycle, one expert told OSV News.

“It is important to ... remember persecuted Christians in many countries around the world. Their suffering gets no coverage at all by major media,” said Joop Koopman, director of communications for Aid to the Church in Need in the United States.

Founded in 1947 as a Catholic aid organization for war refugees and recognized as a pontifical foundation since 2011, ACN is dedicated to the service of Christians around the world, wherever they are persecuted or oppressed or suffering material need.

Based in Brooklyn, New York, the nonprofit ACN provides pastoral and humanitarian assistance to the persecuted church in more than 145 countries, working under the guidance of the pope.

More than 360 million of the world’s estimated 2.6 billion Christians — or one in seven Christians globally — currently experience “high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith,” according to Open Doors U.S., an advocacy group that provides Bibles and support to persecuted Christians in more than 70 countries.

One in five Christians in Africa and two in five in Asia experience persecution, according to Open Doors, which notes that over the last three decades, the number of countries where Christians suffer high and extreme levels of persecution has almost doubled to 76.

Direct forms of persecution include attacks on life and property, assassinations, imprisonment, torture, restricted access to churches and Bibles, forced conversions, and violence against women, while indirect attacks take the form of educational and employment discrimination, legal restrictions and denial of rights, according to the nonprofit In-

ternational Christian Concern.

Both Christian Concern and Open Doors rank North Korea, Nigeria, India, Iran, China, Pakistan, Eritrea and Algeria as top countries for Christian persecution, with North Korea taking the No. 1 spot in Open Doors’ 2023 World Watch List.

In its 2023 report, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom recommended that the State Department redesignate 12 nations as countries of particular concern — Burma, China, Cuba, Eritrea, Iran, Nicaragua, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. In addition, the USCIRF added five names to that list: Afghanistan, India, Nigeria, Syria and Vietnam. On the commission’s special watch list are Algeria, the Central African Republic, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Turkey and Uzbekistan.

Christian Concern cited Marxism, radical Islam, social and cultural discrimination and supernatural evil as the key sources of Christian persecution.

North Korea is perhaps the nation most “closed to Christianity and the outside world,” according to Christian Concern. Under the totalitarian regime of Kim Jong Un — referred to as the “Supreme Leader” who demands absolute allegiance — the country’s estimated 200,000 to 400,000 Christians must practice in secret amid imprisonment, torture, rape and extrajudicial killing. Owing a Bible or quoting Scripture can easily lead to death, according to Christian Concern’s “Persecutors of the Year 2023” report, which noted that “Kim is just the latest in a dynastic line that has oppressed North Korea for decades, driving not just the economy into the ground but human rights and religious expression as well.”

In recent weeks, embattled Christians in the Gaza Strip — particularly the hundreds sheltering at Holy Family Church, Gaza’s only Catholic parish — have re-



OSV News Photo/courtesy Aid to the Church in Need
Bishop Jude Arogundade of Ondo, Nigeria, visits a victim of an attack on St. Francis Xavier Church in Owo on Pentecost Sunday June 5, 2022. At least 40 people were killed and scores more injured by bullets and explosives used by several gunman in the attack. Victims ranged in age from 2 to 85.

ceived international attention due to media coverage of the Israel-Hamas war. Koopman told OSV News the church in Iraq is fearful that “the war in Gaza might spread in the region, creating conditions that will prompt Iraqi Christians to leave their country (and) further shrinking the Christian population.”

Concurrently, said Koopman, “in terms of numbers, more Nigerian Christians (have) died” in recent months, “several thousand, at least, most of them in Benue State and in the Diocese of Makurdi in particular.”

Open Doors reported that 90% of the more than 5,600 Christians killed for their faith last year were from Nigeria, with the total number of Christians killed in 2023 up 80% from five years ago.

Koopman said ACN’s latest annual report noted that more than 7,600 Nigerian Christians were killed between January 2021 and June 2022.

On Christmas Eve, at least 140 Nigerians were slain across some 15 central villages by rampaging herders wielding guns and machetes, the worst such attack in the region since 2018. The area has for several years been prone to clashes between Muslim Fulani herders and mainly Christian farmers.

Koopman told OSV News that such “radicalized Muslim Fulani herders” have “continued their killing spree, and no one is brought to justice.”

“There was some hope that the fact that the new Nigerian president (Bola Ahmed Tinubu) is married to a practicing Christian would

translate into government action against the Fulanis, but nothing has been done,” he said.

To the east of Nigeria, Islamist militia have terrorized Christians in Burkina Faso, singling them out and “forcing them to adopt Muslim dress and customs,” said Koopman, noting that Burkina Faso “has fallen victim to a terrorist takeover of the Sahel region,” the 10 African nations located between the Sahara Desert and the continent’s tropical south.

As they face the third year of a full-scale invasion by Russia — which continues attacks launched in 2014 — Ukrainians, most of whom identify as Christian, “are feeling very, very tired. People are exhausted, because there is no sign that the conflict is coming to an end,” Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, head of the worldwide Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, told ACN. “The population is terribly traumatized by the war ... Some are physically injured, but above all they are wounded in their souls.”

Russia’s invasion, declared a genocide in two joint reports from New Lines Institute and the Raoul Wallenberg Center for Human Rights, has seen Russian troops arrest and kill clergy; destroy Catholic, Christian and other houses of worship; and “outlaw” the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and several other faith confessions in at least one occupied territory. Two Redemptorist

See “Persecution” on Page 10



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Persecution

Cont'd from Page 9
priests, Father Ivan Levysky and Father Bohdan Heleta, remain unaccounted for after being detained in November 2022 and reportedly tortured since their arrest.

In Nicaragua, "the regime of (President) Daniel Ortega ... is determined to continue to oppress the church, effectively silencing it," said Koopman. "Ortega sees the church as a threat to the regime, because of its powerful witness and sympathy for the opposition, which has practically disappeared."

Under the Ortega regime, clergy, religious and laypeople have been harassed, detained, imprisoned and expelled — most notably Bishop Rolando Álvarez of Matagalpa, stripped of his citizenship and now serving a 26-year sentence for refusing to be exiled to the U.S. Charges against the bishop, an outspoken critic of Ortega, included treason, undermining national integrity and spreading false news.

On Dec. 21, Bishop Isidoro Mora was arrested, with some reports indicating the bishop had briefly asked for prayers for Bishop Álvarez and his diocese in a homily.

On Dec. 28, Nicaraguan lawyer Martha Molina reported on X, formerly known as Twitter that Msgr. Carlos Avilés, vicar general of the Archdioceses of Managua, was abducted by the Ministry of Interior.

The pro-Ortega congress has closed 3,500 nongovernmental organizations and expelled priests and women religious, including the Missionaries of Charity. Auxiliary Bishop Silvio José Báez of Managua has lived in exile since 2019 and ministers to a growing Nicaraguan diaspora in Miami.

Pakistan "continues to be a country of concern," where a "tiny Christian minority suffers severe discrimination" and multiple accusations under the nation's blasphemy laws, said Koopman. In August, a rumored desecration of the Quran by two brothers led to mob rampage that destroyed hundreds of homes and several churches in the industrial district of Faisalabad.

In China, "believers are monitored and sometimes harassed for attending Mass," said Koopman, with the government "pushing churches to take on a Chinese communist identity and become a patriotic front."

Koopman also questioned the efficacy of the Vatican's "provisional agreement" with the Chinese government, by which the two entities coordinate

on the appointment of bishops.

"It is unclear what good the Sino-Vatican agreement is doing. The regime has appointed bishops without any input from Rome," said Koopman, noting that some imprisoned bishops and clergy "have been disappeared and not heard from in a long time."

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



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Papa Francisco: Lleven la gratitud y la esperanza de la Virgen María al nuevo año

Por Justin McLellan,
Catholic News Service

CIUDAD DEL VATICANO (CNS) — En la víspera de Año Nuevo, creyentes y no creyentes dan gracias por todo lo que han recibido en los últimos 12 meses y expresan sus esperanzas para el próximo año, pero los cristianos están llamados a cultivar su gratitud y esperanza siguiendo el ejemplo de María, dijo el Papa Francisco.

"La fe nos permite vivir esta hora de un modo distinto al de una mentalidad mundana", dijo el Papa durante un servicio de oración vespertino en la Basílica de San Pedro el 31 de diciembre. "La fe en Jesucristo, Dios encarnado, nacido de la Virgen María, da una nueva forma de sentir el tiempo y la vida".

El Papa Francisco dijo que mientras muchas personas expresan gratitud y esperanza en la víspera de Año Nuevo, en realidad, a menudo "les falta la dimensión esencial que es la de la relación con el Otro y con los demás, con Dios y con los hermanos y hermanas".

Con una mentalidad mundana, la gratitud y la

esperanza "están aplastadas sobre el yo, sobre los propios intereses", dijo. "No van más allá de la satisfacción y el optimismo".

El Papa Francisco animó a los cristianos a fijarse en el ejemplo de María que, tras dar a luz a Jesús, tenía en su corazón la gratitud de una madre por haber dado a luz al hijo de Dios.

"El misterio hace lugar a la gratitud, que aflora en la contemplación del don, en la gratitud, mientras se sofoca en la ansiedad del tener y del parecer", dijo el papa. "La Iglesia aprende la gratitud de la Virgen María".

El Papa dijo también que la esperanza de María y de la Iglesia "no es optimismo, es otra cosa: es fe en un Dios fiel a sus promesas".

"Esta fe toma la forma de esperanza en la dimensión del tiempo", dijo. "Los cristianos, como María, somos peregrinos de esperanza".

Cerca del altar mayor de la basílica había un icono de la "Madonna Lactans", o Virgen de la Lactancia, procedente de la abadía benedictina de Montevergine, en Mercogliano, Italia. El icono, de es-

tilo bizantino, muestra a María amamantando al niño Jesús. El Papa rezó en silencio ante la imagen antes de salir de la basílica.

La Misa culminó con el coro y las 6.500 personas presentes en la basílica cantando el "Te Deum" ("Te alabamos, oh Dios") en acción de gracias por las bendiciones del año pasado.

En su homilía, el Papa Francisco señaló que el próximo año supondría una intensa preparación para el Año Santo 2025. Sin embargo, más que preocuparse por organizar la logística y los eventos, el Papa pidió a la gente que fuera testigo de la "calidad ética y espiritual de la convivencia".

Como ejemplo, señaló que en la plaza de San Pedro se reúnen personas de todas las nacionalidades, culturas y religiones, por lo que la basílica debe ser acogedora para todos y ofrecer información accesible.

A continuación, el Papa ponderó el encanto del centro histórico de Roma, pero dijo que también debe ser accesible para las personas con discapacidad y los an-



anos.

Roberto Gualtieri, alcalde de Roma, se sentó en la primera fila de la basílica durante el servicio de oración y saludó al Papa a su conclusión.

El Papa Francisco señaló que una peregrinación "requiere una buena preparación", y recordó que 2024 se dedicará a la oración antes del Año Santo.

"¿Y qué mejor maestra que nuestra santa Madre?", preguntó el Papa. "Aprendamos de ella a vivir cada día, cada momento, cada mirada interior dirigida a Jesús".

Tras la oración, el Papa saludó a la gente que se alineaba a lo largo de la nave central de la basílica. Después, montado en su silla de ruedas, salió a rezar ante el Nacimiento en la Plaza de San Pedro, tomándose su tiempo para saludar a los visitantes, bendecir a los niños y escuchar a la banda de la Guardia Suiza mientras tocaba villancicos.

Se muestra una estatua de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe en la cancillería de Wheeling.

Foto de Colleen Rowan

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

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

Para informar a las autoridades diocesanas: La diócesis alienta a informar a las autoridades civiles apropiadas, ante todo, si se ha cometido un delito. La diócesis también alienta a informar a las autoridades 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; Muy Reverendo Dennis Schuelkens, Jr., V.E., ext. 270; o Sor Martha Gómez, ext. 264. También puede llamar a la Oficina de Ambiente Seguro de la Diócesis al

304.230.1504. También puede llamar a la línea directa de abuso sexual de la Diócesis al 833.230.5656. Los formularios de queja están disponibles en línea en www.dwc.org, haga clic en "Diócesis" en la barra de menú, luego en "Oficinas", luego en "Ambiente seguro", luego "Descargar archivos y formularios". El formulario se titula "Formulario de queja para denuncias de abuso sexual de menores". El formulario se puede devolver por correo de EE. UU. A: Office of Safe Environment, Diócesis de Wheeling-Charleston, PO Box 230, Wheeling WV 26003.

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

Además de los métodos enumerados anteriormente para denunciar el abuso sexual, la Diócesis también se ha asociado con Navex Global para ofrecer la plataforma EthicsPoint para informar otras inquietudes adicionales, como sospecha de mala conducta financiera, profesional y personal de un sacerdote, diácono, religioso, o empleado laico de la Diócesis o cualquier parroquia o escuela católica en West Virginia. Se puede acceder a la plataforma EthicsPoint a través de www.dwc.org, en "Rendición de cuentas", luego "Informar mala conducta" o llamando al 844.723.8381. EthicsPoint es un sistema de informes de terceros que informa a las autoridades civiles cuando corresponda y a las autoridades diocesanas, y la identidad de la persona que informa 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.

‘Padre Pio’ Actor Shia LaBeouf Fully Enters the Catholic Church New Year’s Eve

By Gina Christian

(OSV News) — An actor who recently portrayed a beloved saint on screen has now fully come into the Catholic Church in real life.

Shia LaBeouf, a Hollywood veteran and star of director Abel Ferrara’s film “Padre Pio,” received the sacrament of confirmation, completing his initiation into the Catholic faith, during the New Year holiday weekend, according to announcements posted Jan. 2 to Facebook and Instagram by the Capuchin Franciscans’ Western American Province.

The friars posted several pictures of a smiling LaBeouf with the friars and Bishop Robert E. Barron of Winona-Rochester, Minnesota, who had previously interviewed the actor through his Word on Fire apostolate.

Capuchin Father Joseph Seraphin Dederick, the provincial, told OSV News that Bishop Barron administered the sacrament to LaBeouf at the Old Mission Santa Inés in Solvang, California, on Dec. 31.

OSV News has reached out to the Capuchins’ Western American Province and Bishop Barron for comment.

“We are thrilled to share that our dear friend Shia LaBeouf has fully entered the Church this past weekend through the sacrament of confirmation!” the friars said in their posts, adding that they “are overjoyed to welcome him into the fold and witness his deep commitment to his faith journey.”

LaBeouf developed both working and personal relationships with the friars while researching his role in “Padre Pio.”

Speaking to OSV News in May, LaBeouf said he “wasn’t even trying to make movies” when Ferrara approached him about the role.

The acclaimed 37-year-old actor — whose Emmy-winning career as a kid on the Disney Channel blossomed into big-screen success — found himself “totally lost” after his inner demons led to partying, work conflicts and run-ins with the law.

“I was wandering around, living in my truck,” he said. “I wasn’t interested in acting anymore.”

As LaBeouf began confronting his personal issues, Ferrara tapped him for “Padre Pio,” a saint to whom the Bronx-born director — best known for his gritty cinematic takes on the underworld — felt himself “drawn.”

While researching the film, LaBeouf met Brother Alexander Rodriguez, a



OSV News Photo/YouTube
Actor Shia LaBeouf chats with Bishop Robert E. Barron of Winona-Rochester, Minnesota, in this screen shot taken from an Aug. 23, 2022, interview. Bishop Barron administered the sacrament of confirmation to LaBeouf, star of director Abel Ferrara’s film “Padre Pio,” on Dec. 31 completing the Hollywood veteran’s journey of coming into full communion with the Catholic Church.



OSV News Photo/Gravitas Ventures
Shia LaBeouf stars in the 2023 film “Padre Pio.” LaBeouf entered into full communion with the Catholic Church after receiving the sacrament of confirmation on Dec. 31.

Capuchin Franciscan who is assistant vocation director at the order’s Old Mission Santa Inés.

Soon LaBeouf was asking about more than one of the congregation’s most beloved saints.

“Shia was looking to know about Padre Pio, and then delved into the faith,” Brother Alexander told OSV News in May. “He got into RCIA (referring to the Order of Christian Initiation for Adults). The friars

and I were helping to catechize him.”

LaBeouf told OSV News at the time “(learning) how to pray the rosary” brought a “tangible relief” that he had previously sought through drugs, alcohol and life in the fast lane.

The lessons continued as Brother Alexander accompanied LaBeouf to Italy for filming, with the Capuchin providing technical assistance for the project while appearing in the

movie as Padre Pio’s fellow Capuchin and spiritual adviser.

“I fell in love with Christ,” LaBeouf told OSV News in May.

Now the actor, “known for his incredible talent and passion in the entertainment industry, has embarked on a profound spiritual journey that has led him to embrace the teachings of the Catholic Church,” the Capuchin friars wrote in their Jan. 2 Facebook and Instagram posts. “His decision to fully enter the Church is a testament to his sincere desire to grow in his relationship with God and live out the Gospel values.”

The friars added, “As Ca-

puchin Franciscans, we believe in the transformative power of faith and the incredible impact it can have on one’s life. We are humbled and grateful to walk alongside Shia as he takes this important step in his spiritual journey.

“We invite you to join us in celebrating this momentous occasion and to keep Shia LaBeouf in your prayers as he continues to deepen his faith and seek God’s guidance in his life,” the friars said. “May his example inspire others to explore their own spiritual paths and find solace in the loving embrace of the Church.”

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

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Young Catholic Achieves Rank of Eagle Scout

BRIDGEPORT—An Eagle Scout Ceremony for Matthew Lunsford, a parishioner of All Saints in Bridgeport, was held Dec. 10. He is a member of Troop 40 of Bridgeport—Mountaineer Area Council.

The rank of Eagle is the highest rank a Boy Scout can achieve.

For his project, Lunsford built a picnic table, hatchet target, and two archery targets with stalls located on the Bridgeport City Trail across the street from the basketball courts.

He was proud to have a project

that benefits the city and thankful for all the leaders that have helped him achieve this honor.

Lunsford has been in Boy Scouts since 2013, at the age of 5.

His favorite scout memory is of hiking up to Eagle Rock, the highest point that overlooks Camp Mahonegon, after crossing over from Cub Scouts to Boy Scouts. He loves being outdoors and has always loved camping, so he said, "It was easy for me to fall in love with it. Even if being outdoors isn't your thing, there are still plenty of other

things to do."

He continued: "Boy Scouts has taught me about life skills and what it means to be a leader. I encourage everyone to at least give it a shot."

Lunsford also is a new member of the Music Ministry at All Saints, now playing trumpet with the parish brass ensemble.

At right is Matthew Lunsford, who achieved the rank of Eagle Scout. He is a member of All Saints Parish in Bridgeport.

Courtesy Photo



Christmas Bells Were Ringing at Parkersburg Catholic High School

The Parkersburg Catholic High School Hand Bell Choir performs Christmas songs for the Wood County Rotary Club Dec. 14. The choir also held a performance at the school Dec. 11. Talented young musicians at many of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston's Catholic schools held Christmas concerts and performances at their schools as well. (Courtesy Photo)



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