July 31, 2026 Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston Vol. 56, No. 32

THE CATHOLIC Spirit

West Virginia Catholics, Bishop Menjívar Join in Flood Relief in Lewis and Upshur Counties

Diocese's Flood Relief Collection to be Held at Masses This Weekend

By Colleen Rowan

In Lewis County and Weston, "it's devastation," Father Doug Ondeck said in a video update he posted to St. Patrick Parish's Facebook Page on July 28. It was just days after flash flooding struck the region leaving two Upshur County residents dead and catastrophe in its wake.

"The town itself was hit extremely hard," said Father Ondeck, who is the pastor of St. Patrick Parish and School in Weston. "We've been trying to go into the outlying areas in the county, and the need is great there. A lot of agencies have yet to get to those places and a lot of

See "Relief" on Page 3

Courtesy photo

After clearing mud and debris from a flood-ravaged house in Weston, Bishop Evelio Menjívar (second from left) and Father Doug Ondeck (left) talk to volunteers.

Clarksburg Catholic Schools Invite All to 'Stand with St. Patrick's School'

By Colleen Rowan

CLARKSBURG — "Together, we can help our friends and 'Stand with St. Patrick's School,'" Notre Dame High School officials posted to Facebook July 23. The message came just days after flash flooding devastated Lewis and Upshur counties and destroyed St. Patrick's preschool and art rooms.

Notre Dame, along with St. Mary Central School in Clarksburg, have started a fundraising campaign to help their sister Catholic school to recover.

"Every dollar donated goes directly to St. Patrick's to replace lost supplies, restore classrooms, and meet urgent needs so students can begin the school year as planned. Together, we can help them rebuild with faith, hope, and love," the schools said in their online campaign.

Upon hearing of the damage at St. Patrick's, Catholic Schools Superintendent Jennifer Hornyak rushed to Weston to help. And she was overwhelmed by what she saw.

"There were preschool toys, art supplies, books, classrooms tables covered in mud," she said. "Seeing that level of destruction is always so hard and this was the first time I had seen this

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Diocesan Official Appointments

Bishop Evelio Menjívar has made public the following appointments:

Very Rev. Leonard Smith, V.F., is appointed Vicar Forane of the Beckley Vicariate for a period of one year, beginning July 3, 2026, and ending July 2, 2027. This appointment is made in addition to his current assignment as Pastor of St. Francis de Sales Parish, Beckley.

Father Kishore Varaparla, H.G.N., is appointed Chaplain to Fairmont State University. This assignment is in addition to his pastoral duties as Pastor of Immaculate Conception Parish, Fairmont.

Father Nidheesh Jacob is appointed Parochial Vicar of St. Joseph Parish, Martinsburg, with residence at the parish rectory, effective July 27, 2026.

Father Babu Joseph Elamturuthil is appointed Pastor of St. Brendan Parish, Elkins; St. Patrick Mission, Coalton; St. John Bosco Chapel, Huttonsville; and Davis and Elkins College, Elkins, effective immediately.

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All Saints Choir is under the direction of Stephen Pishner. Stephen is a 1990 Graduate of WV Wesleyan, with a Bachelors in Music Education with an emphasis in Pipe Organ. He is the Director of Music and Liturgy in Bridgeport, WV and is a published composer with G. I. A. Publications. Stephen is a singer, keyboardist, composer and emerging recording artist and is best defined as an eclectic energetic musician. He also has a band called AMICI, that plays Classic Popular Top 40 music, as well as Country Music, Standards and Italian music. He can be heard on their most recent recording AMICI "Rockin' the Streets".

Chad Carter, a Wheeling native. Graduated summa cum laude from Wheeling Jesuit University in 1999 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in History; in 2001, he graduated from WJU with a Masters in Business Administration.
In 2009, he became Chancellor of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. Since 1993, Chad has worked at various parishes as music director and organist.

Reserve your spot today:
Contact Anna Marie Troiani
Phone: 304-907-0171
Email: atroiani@csjoseph.org

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

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

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Relief...

Cont'd from Page 1

church volunteers—not only St. Patrick's but other churches—have really been the first on site in those areas."

Many people, he said, are still without electricity and even water.

"Here, at the parish, we have a group of volunteers collecting information of people who need assistance," Father Ondeck said in the post. "We've had a number of people reach out and we're expecting donations of kitchen appliances and hot water heaters, but we really need to know who the people are that need those items the most."

In his post, Father Ondeck listed the greatest needs — pressure washers, box fans, dehumidifiers, and able-bodied volunteers to help with washing, general cleanup, and hauling debris to the curbside.

While engaged in relief efforts, the parish is also faced with a severely damaged parish school. On the day of the flood, the water rushed down Center Avenue and poured into the ground floor widows of St. Patrick School. The water completely submerged the basement, rising beyond the ceiling, school officials said. The preschool and art classrooms were completely destroyed.

On the day of his post, Father Ondeck said the parish and school are at the stage in which light demolition would begin — "the tearing out of drywall, pulling up of carpeting and some flooring."

After learning of the flooding, Bishop Evelio Menjívar went to Weston to see the devastation first hand and joined Father Ondeck in cleanup efforts at the school and in the area. They, along with diocesan seminarians, cleared mud and debris from the school and reached out to help others in the community. Bishop Menjívar ascended a ladder to survey damage to a resident's roof and begin work.

"Let us change the whole roof. Helping people in need. Cambiaremos todo el techo!!! Ayudando a la gente necesitada en WV," the

See "Relief" on Page 4

Stand...

Cont'd from Page 1

level of flood damage at one of our schools. The immediate bright spot was seeing the principal, pastor, the teachers and all the volunteers working together to clear all the debris so that the cleanup could begin."

Notre Dame and St. Mary Central's goal is to raise $40,000 by Aug. 10 for St. Patrick's.

"Every gift, large or small, makes a difference," officials of the schools said in Facebook posts.

Click on this link to make a donation https://square.link/u/5CPNbY7A?src=sheet

Courtesy photo

Debris piles up outside of St. Patrick School in Weston.

Courtesy photo

Volunteers help out at St. Patrick School in Weston July 25.

Courtesy photo

St. Patrick School students help in flood relief efforts in Weston July 29.

Click here for video

Screenshot
Father Doug Ondeck posts a video update on flood recovery to St. Patrick Parish's Facebook Page on July 28. Click above to view the video.

Courtesy photo
Bishop Evelio Menjívar stands on a ladder surveying a damaged roof of a home in flood-devastated Lewis County July 27.

Relief...

Cont'd from Page 3

bishop said in a Facebook post about the project.

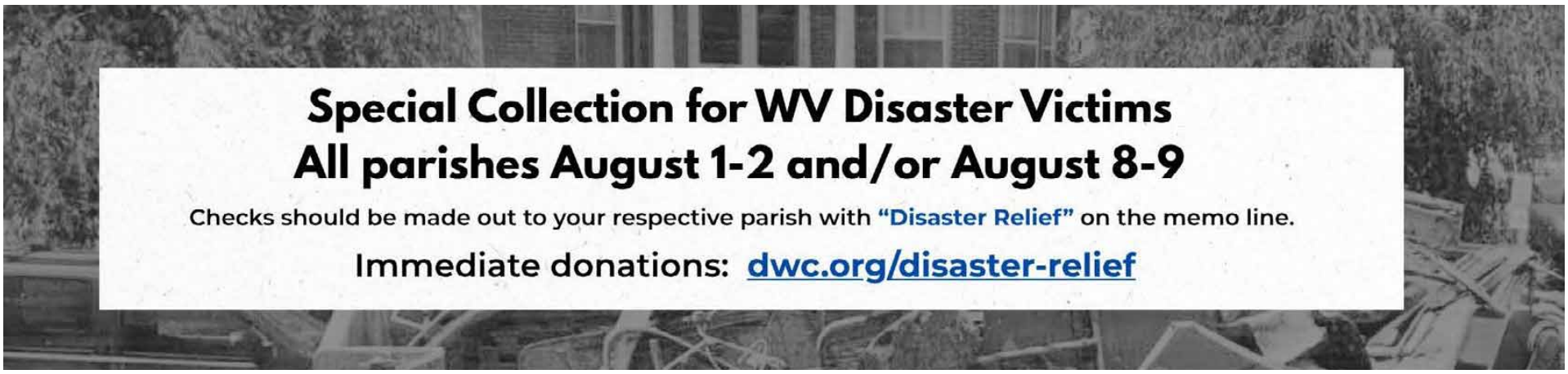
In an appeal for volunteers and prayers after the flooding as the devastation was clear, Bishop Menjívar asked the faithful to join him in prayer and reaching out to those hurting.

"Now is the time to put our faith into action, assisting our sisters and brothers in love and care for one another," he said. "Let us be the answer to their prayers for help and comfort. These beautiful mountains that we call home, carry within itself also many risks to human life, but every unfortunate event presents us an opportunity to rise up."

Answering that call, volunteers from St. Patrick Parish and School have been helping their neighbors, cleaning 20 flood-damaged homes in just one day. All the while, they are making time to clean and repair their beloved school and have it ready for students in just a few weeks.

Catholic Schools Superintendent

See "Relief" on Page 5



Relief...

Cont'd from Page 4

Jennifer Hornyak was among many who headed to Weston to help in the first few days of the catastrophe.

"It took many people many hours to clear out the flooded debris," said Hornyak who was among those helping Father Ondeck. "I am so grateful to everyone that is helping our school, parish, and the whole community of Weston as they rebuild. There is still so much work to do in the cleanup and rebuilding and I ask that everyone continue to help in anyway that they can. Most of all, please continue to pray for our school, parish, and entire Weston community (and surrounding areas)."

Many West Virginia Catholics from all over the state came to help as well including diocesan seminarians; members of St. James the Greater Parish in Charles Town and St. John University Parish in Morgantown; Clarksburg Notre Dame High School students; and students, staff, parents, and alumni of St. Patrick School.

Parishes across the diocese have sent donations and supplies and continue to offer their prayers.

"We are deeply humbled by the outpouring of support from our community, volunteers, Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, school family, and throughout the state and even across the country," officials said in a post on St. Patrick Parish's Facebook Page. "Thank you to our church leadership including Bishop Evelio Menjivar-Ayala and Jennifer Hornyak who went straight to work mucking out houses and helping those in need."

As work continues at the school, Father Ondeck said they are in need of people with knowledge of electrical work, plumbing, construction, and carpentry to help.

Lora Pierce, Disaster Services specialist for Catholic Charities West Virginia, provided update July 28 with information provided by WV VOAD (West Virginia Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster). Of the reported 1,761 surveys, Lewis County has 682—eight homes destroyed, 101 with major damages, 236 with minor damages, 137 affected, and 21 as inaccessible. In Upshur County, 958 surveys were conducted reporting 10 homes destroyed, 75 with major damages, 350 with minor damages, 313 affected, 28 inaccessible, and 68 unaffected.

Father Ondeck ended his update on Facebook by saying that in this devastation there is hope.

"There's an opportunity to grow in virtue," he said. "And I have told my parishioners the one thing that I hope was washed away in the flood was hatred and division. And I've seen not only in Weston, but in the county itself, neighbors coming together. People that don't even know each other are stopping and helping people that have been affected by this flood."

He asked all to pray for the community and to help if they can.

Ways to Help Flood Victims

Many St. Patrick Parishioners are facing extreme financial hardship in recovering from the flood. The parish has started an appeal for help. Read about the stories of parishioners on Pages 6-7. Checks can be made out to St. Patrick Church with "Flood Relief" in the memo and mailed to 210 Center Ave. Weston, WV 26452.

Donations for St. Patrick School can be made at https://stpatswv.org/donate/

The Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston will hold its flood relief collection at Masses in West Virginia parishes this weekend (Aug. 1-2) and/or Aug. 8-9. Diocesan officials said in a press release that all of the funds collected will remain in West Virginia and will be managed by Catholic Charities West Virginia (CCWVa). They also said that monies will support both immediate and long-term needs met by CCWVa and affiliated Catholic agencies.

To donate or for additional information, visit https://dwc.org/disaster-relief/

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Appeal by St. Patrick Parish

Faith in the Flood

STORIES FROM OUR COMMUNITY & OPPORTUNITIES TO HELP.

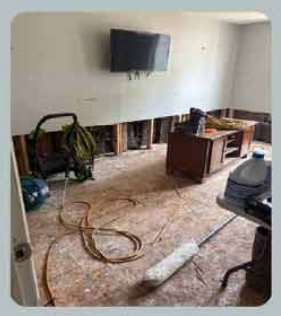
Family names have been changed for their privacy

THE ST. FLORIAN FAMILY

This young, twenty-something couple should still be enjoying the honeymoon phase of their marriage. Instead, they are now living with relatives while facing an unexpected, total "gut job" on their very first home. Having worked tirelessly to purchase this home and launch a promising new small business, they now face an uncertain economic future as the floods destroyed everything without sparing even treasured photos of deceased family members.

The wife's roots run deep at St. Patrick's; she, her parents, and her grandparents all attended the school. For decades, her family members have been staples of our parish, coaching youth sports and leading local charitable events. True to that legacy of service, despite their own devastating losses, they have spent the days following the flood helping neighbors clear out damage. Armed with hard work, community support, and an unwavering Catholic faith, they are determined to rebuild their lives and their hometown.

THE ST. MEDARD FAMILY



The Summer of 2026 was meant to be a hard-earned time for celebration for one Weston family. With their kids thriving in school and the family matriarch, who had been battling breastcancer, recieved a highly favorable prognosis. The celebration ended too soon on July 21 when a historical torrential storm and the resulting flash flooding completely destroyed their home, burying their possessions under thick mud and water. The lost was devastating.

Yet, while the water took their physical belongings, it could not dampen the family's resilient spirit. When relief volunteers arrived to assess the damage, they were greeted not with despair, but with warm smiles and heartfelt hugs. Witnessing years of hard work being hauled out to the sidewalk in trash piles, a volunteer became visibly upset. In a moving display of grace, one of the family's children comforted the volunteer. Due to their strong Catholic faith, this family chooses to place their trust in Jesus and in the goodness of their Catholic community in WV.

THE ST. HYACINTH FAMILY

Retirement is overrated for one long-time St. Patrick couple who could have retired years ago, yet remain deeply active in community and in parish life. The family owned two buildings, now which require total remodeling. Both structures have passed down by preceeding generations and have been utilized as safe housing for their fellow community members. One home was occupied by a hard-working single mother and her son, who had to evacuate by boat into the dark of night. Now displaced and living with nearby family, these wonderful tennants, active community members in their own right, are weighing heavily on the landlords' hearts. True to their lifelong spirit of service, this Weston couple's primary concern is not their financial loss, but the safety and stability of their tenants

THE ST. JUDE FAMILY

This Weston family's roots run deep in the history of St.Patrick Church and School spanning parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. It is this foundational faith community that walked aside during an already incredibly difficult year marked by serious illness and the painful loss of a loved one.

On July 21st in less than 90 minutes, surging water destroyed their vehicles, appliances, flooring, cabinetry, toys, and irreplaceable family keepsakes. Yet, as they sift through the mud, they are quick to share that the one thing the flood could not destroy was their deep Catholic faith.

Appeal by St. Patrick Parish

THE ST. MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL FAMILY

BEFORE

Near and dear to the heart of St. Patrick Church and School is a young family who transplanted themselves to Weston following their beautiful conversions to the faith and quickly enmesh themselves into the life of the community. This former beloved St. Patrick School teacher's home suffered wide spread devastation. Seeking refuge from the storm at St. Patrick Church Rectory they watched the water outside rise up higher and higher on the street below seeing waters over 4ft high in some places. (as pictured above). This family with two small children is currently dependent on family for a place to stay as their entire home is unliveable. During this time they have expressed nothing but gratitude for their community to witness those loving their neighbors in action.

AFTER

THE ST. AGNES FAMILY

This family of six includes four star St. Patrick School students.

Serving at St. Patrick Church is nothing new for this branch of a family long established as hard working contributing members of the community and since the flood the Grandparents and Grandchildren alike have volunteered at flood relief efforts at St. Patrick Catholic School.

The wife, a nurse, and the husband described by friends as, "the hardest working couple"- the husband sometimes mangaing up to three jobs at once. All while they have tirelessly fixing up their historic Weston home. During the storm the waters wreaked havoc on the basement and first floor. The children's room that had just been renovated with new floors - comletely destoryed.

Staying with Grandparents. The parents have been at the family home every day making efforts to restore - once again - a cherished weston home.

THE ST. FRANCIS DE SALES FAMILY

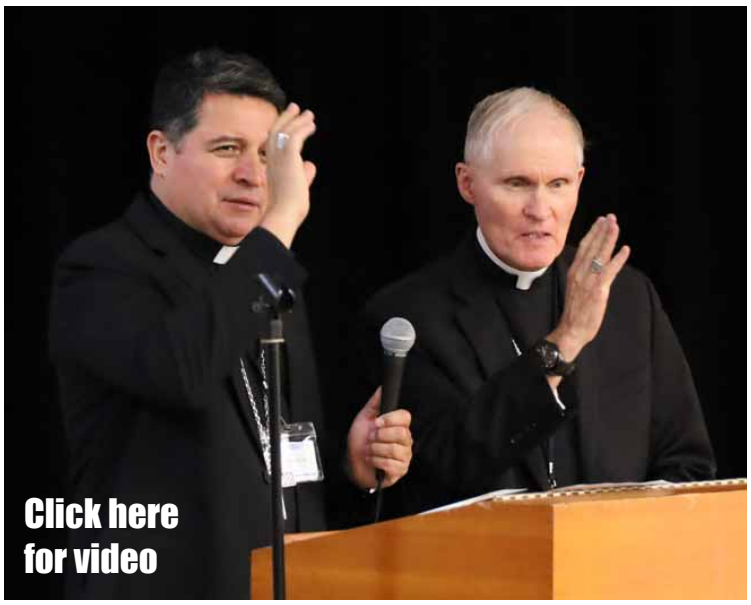
After several years of attending St. Patrick Catholic School, Mom and Daughter were recieved into the Catholic Church. Though new to the the faith, this family already had stong community ties. This former teacher assistants home suffered extreme damage in the flooding. The entire basement and the first floor of their home was completely destroyed. Grateful for the short term rental they've acquired the future is uncertain and return to their home unknown.

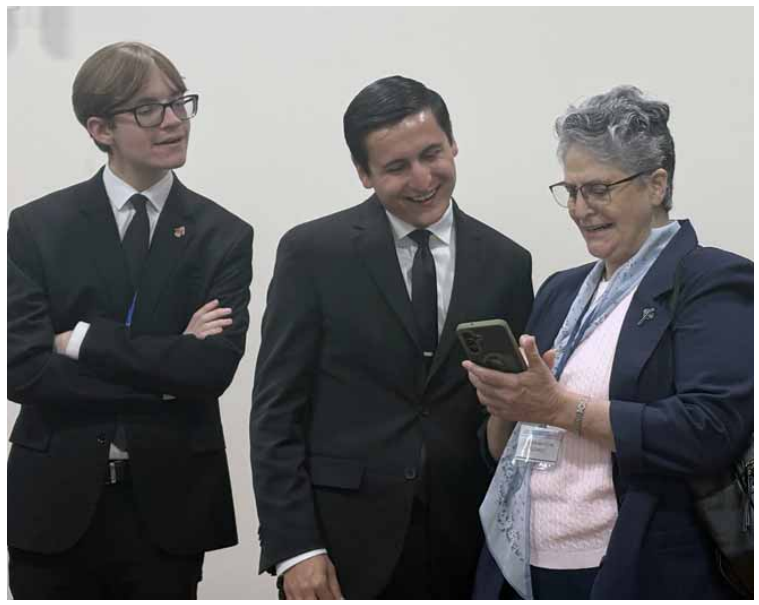
There is no shortage of needs in our community at this time.
Below are just some of the unexpected financial and material needs of our parishioners.
Please, consider sponsoring or contributing towards one of the many needs (costs estimated):

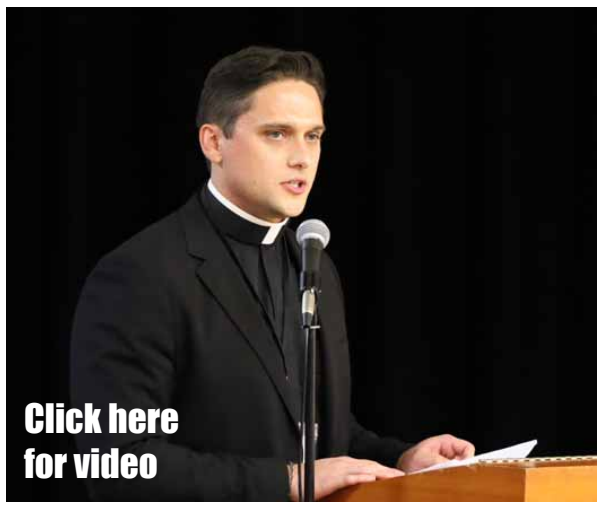
Flooring $5,000 - Insulation $2000 - Clothing for a family $2000- Furniture $2000- - Remodel $20,000-50,000- Kitchen Cabinets $5000 - Roof Replacement - $8000- Cleaning Materials- $500-$1000 - Drywall $5000 -Furniture $5000 - Countertops $1000

CHECKS CAN BE MADE TO ST PATRICK CHURCH MEMO: FLOOD RELIET

Wheeling Serra Club Holds Burse Dinner







Colleen Rowan photos

Clockwise from top left at the Wheeling Serra Club's Burse Dinner: Bishop Evelio Menjívar and Bishop Emeritus Mark Brennan give the final blessing; Jay Prager, president of Wheeling Serra, and Deacon Paul Lim (left) are pictured; Sister Martha Teresa Gomez, RGS, delegate for Consecrated Life for the diocese, talks to seminarians Sebastian Lasko (left) and Dominick Beckman; seminarian Donvito Cortese talks to guests at the dinner; seminarian Michael Tupta gives his talk at the dinner; Serrans Carol Seangio-Pangilinan (left) and Edi Fuller catch up after the dinner.

By Colleen Rowan

WHEELING — The Wheeling Serra Club held its 57th Annual Burse Dinner July 23 at Central Catholic High School's Great Hall. Serrans welcomed Bishop Evelio Menjívar and Bishop Emeritus Mark Brennan, clergy and religious, seminarians, as well as members of the Serra Club of Charleston.

To the delight of all, Father John Soplinski, director of Vocations for the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, introduced the diocese's 15 seminarians who stood and shared a little about themselves. Another highlight was a talk by seminarian Michael Tupta, who expressed his gratitude for the prayers of Serrans and the faithful and encouraged his fellow seminarians in their formation.

"There are men and women all over the 92 parishes, 20 mission churches, and 16 chapels of this diocese that pray for us, by name, every day," Tupta said. "This fact, especially when we travel our diocese and meet these men and women, should humble us greatly."

Wheeling Serra Club President Jay Prager then came forward to present the burse, in support of the seminarians, to Bishop Menjívar.

The dinner also gave Bishop Menjívar the chance to introduce himself, and he told attendees he was humbled to be with them as the diocese's bishop. Noting the saying, "It takes a village to raise a child," he said that it takes wonderful, holy, and dedicated families to raise a young man.

"And it takes a whole church to raise a priest," Bishop Menjívar said. "And you all are part of this wonderful church and are all doing a great job raising new priests."

The bishop went on to say, "I am impressed with the priests that we have here, in the diocese—hard working, dedicated priests taking not only one job but two, three, four responsibilities." Many, he said, have more than one parish and take on additional duties.

Having 15 seminarians, he added, is a great sign of renewal in the Church in West Virginia.

The bishop expressed his gratitude to all present, especially Serrans, "Thank you for the work that you are doing. Thank you for your prayers..."

At the end of the dinner, Bishop Brennan came forward and joined Bishop Menjívar in giving the final blessing.

Diocese Announces New Principals

Colleen Rowan photo

From left are: Dr. Natalie Gigliotti, assistant principal at Notre Dame High School in Clarksburg; Maria Forrester, principal at St. Francis of Assisi School in St. Albans; Shannon Wall, director of Curriculum and Instruction for the diocese's Department of Catholic Schools; Julie Link, office manager; Bishop Evelio Menjívar; Catholic Schools Superintendent Jennifer Hornyak; Traci Stacy, principal at St. Francis de Sales School in Beckley; Denise Basich, principal of Corpus Christi School in Wheeling; and Dr. Joseph Sladky, principal of St. Joseph High School in Martinsburg.

‘May God Continue to Bless America and Guide Us in Faith, Hope, and Love’

Assumption Parish in Keyser celebrated the Fourth of July with prayers for the nation and all who serve. “Today we thank God for the blessings of freedom and pray for our nation, its leaders, and all who have served to protect our liberty,” the parish posted on its Facebook page. “May God continue to bless America and guide us in faith, hope, and love. Have a safe and blessed Fourth of July!” Here are a few photos of the patriotic decor inside and outside of the church. (Courtesy photos)

U.S. Bishops Call For Nationwide Prayer and Action Amid Rising Abortion Rate

WASHINGTON (OSV News) — The U.S. Catholic bishops are getting ready a nationwide call to prayer and action, with an official launch date of Aug. 18, to mobilize Catholics to address the rising abortion rate and the increased availability of an abortion-inducing drug.

"Every abortion involves the death of a child and harm to the mother. Now with easier access to abortion pills, the abortion rate is tragically climbing, along with increased health risks," Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Bishop Daniel E. Thomas of Toledo, chairman of the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities, said in joint remarks.

According to an estimate from Guttmacher Institute, a research firm for the abortion industry, 1.12 million abortions took place in 2025, marking a 21% increase from 2020. Guttmacher said 2020 marked "the last year of comprehensive national estimates" before the 2022 U.S. Supreme Court's Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization decision. Dobbs overturned the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision and its related abortion precedents, returning the matter of abortion back to the legislative branch.

Guttmacher found the figures for 2025 were largely unchanged from the prior year, but suggested abortion numbers overall may be an undercount due to people acquiring abortion pills in advance or obtaining them by means other than U.S. abortion clinic providers.

Abortion rates in the U.S. bottomed out in 2017, when they were estimated to be just over 862,000, and began increasing again in the first Trump administration, which also approved the first generic for mifepristone, commonly called "the abortion pill," in 2019. The pill is commonly used in combination with misoprostol for early abortion, although the same combination is also used in some miscarriage care protocols that were more recently recommended for consideration by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

More than six of 10 abortions in the U.S. are performed through a combination of mifepristone and misoprostol, according to recent estimates.

A federal policy permitting distribution by mail of mifepristone was first issued by the Biden administration following the Dobbs decision. The policy has thus far been left in place by the second Trump administration, which approved a second generic for mifepristone in 2025 to the shock of pro-life groups.

The Department of Justice, under the current Trump administration, has also sought to block state challenges to the policy pending a promised safety review by the Food and Drug Administration. But the status and timeline of the FDA review are unclear.

Archbishop Coakley and Bishop Thomas stated that the FDA "has enabled a nationwide mail-order abortion industry by allowing abortion pills to be prescribed in telehealth appointments and sold both at neighborhood pharmacies and online, circumventing state laws that protect life in the womb."

"This leaves women vulnerable to suffering an abortion alone at home, without any medical supervision," they said. "It also sets up additional opportunities for exploitation by violent partners or human traffickers."

The bishops said that from the official start of the campaign through the end of October, when the Church in the U.S. marks Respect Life Month, "the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities is inviting Catholics to join a focused effort of prayer and action to stop the spread of abortion pills."

They urged Catholics to seek "the intercession of St. Joseph, Defender of Life" as well as to send messages to pharmacies and pharmaceutical companies that are involved.

The USCCB is gearing up to mobilize Catholics all over the U.S. with resources in time for the Aug. 18 launch of the campaign.

"We are setting up a simple online platform allowing users to click and send one message that will go to multiple entities, such as brick-and-mortar pharmacies and online pharmacies, distributors, and pharmaceutical companies," Kat Talalas, assistant director for pro-life communications at the USCCB's Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities, told OSV News. "We are also developing educational resources about the abortion pill, which will help explain distinctions between miscarriage care versus ending the life of a child in an abortion."

The Catholic Church teaches that all human life is sacred from conception to natural death, and as such, opposes direct abortion. Following the Dobbs decision, U.S. Church officials have reaffirmed the Church's concern for both mother and child, and have called for enhancing support to those made vulnerable to abortion through poverty and other factors.

(Peter Jesserer Smith is the national news and features editor for OSV News. OSV News staff contributed to this report.)

The Respect Life Prayer to St. Joseph can be found here in English https://www.respectlife.org/prayer-to-st-joseph and here in Spanish https://es.respectlife.org/prayer-to-st-joseph. More information on how to join the USCCB action campaign can be found here: https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/sl/iLd6hbl

Medjugorje Shrine Targeted in Overnight Vandalism, Altar Fire

By Junno Arocho Esteves

(OSV News) — Police are investigating several acts of vandalism and desecration at the famed village of Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina, where Marian apparitions are alleged to have occurred since 1981.

In a statement published July 28, the town's parish church of St. James said it received the news of the vandalism "with great sadness," and said it was working to clean and repair the damage "so that all areas would be properly prepared for the prayer again."

"We pray for the conversion of the hearts of those who committed this act, that the Lord may touch them with His grace and lead them on the path of goodness," the parish said.

"We also pray for peace in the hearts of all people. Our Lady constantly invites us to be carriers of peace. May this event encourage us to take her invitation even more seriously: not to return evil for evil, but to witness love, forgiveness, and hope with our lives."

St. James Church, the parish said, would remain open to pilgrims.

According to local media reports, police in the neighboring town of Citluk received a report at 4:30 a.m. July 28 that several statues of Mary, referred to as "Gospa," or "Our Lady" in Croatian, were vandalized.

In photos posted by Bosnian online news portal bljesak.info, the vandal covered areas of the statue in black spray paint, along with various blasphemous writings against Mary.

Other inscriptions by the vandal included "Medjugorje is a deception," "devil" and "Jesus only" spray-painted across several areas.

Police also found a banner with the first names of the six alleged visionaries: Vicka Ivankovic-Mijatovic, Mirjana Dragicevic-Soldo, Marija Pavlovic-Lunetti, Ivan Dragicevic, Ivanka Ivankovic-Elez and Jakov Colic.

Underneath their names was a message written in Polish that read: "To oszusci, mam dowody" ("They are fraudsters, I have evidence").

About 30 minutes after police were informed of the vandalism, a fire broke out at the altar of St. James Church. A security camera video posted on X showed a man pouring a flammable liquid around the altar and igniting a fire.

The Interreligious Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina said the acts of vandalism were "a profound insult" to Catholics and "an attack on the peace, mutual respect and dignity of all people in Bosnia and Herzegovina."

"Sacred sites, regardless of which church or religious community they belong to, must be protected and respected," the council said in a statement posted on its Facebook page.

The council also praised the response by St. James Church, saying that its call for pilgrims to respond to evil with prayer and fasting was "a testimony of faith, responsibility and true commitment to peace."

"However, forgiveness does not exclude the responsibility of the perpetrator, nor the obligation of the competent institutions to fully shed light on this case," it said. "We must respond to the desecration of sacred places with a common condemnation, protection of the right of every person to freely profess their faith and an even stronger commitment to a society of peace, mutual respect and forgiveness."

OSV News photo/courtesy The Interreligious Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina

A vandalized statue of the Virgin Mary — with areas of the statue covered in black spray paint, along with various blasphemous writings against Mary — is seen in Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina, July 28.

Millions of pilgrims visit the site where six young people claimed that Mary had appeared to them in 1981. Some of the six say Mary still appears to them and gives them messages each day, while others say they see her only once a year now.

Three separate diocesan commissions between 1982 and 1990 studied the alleged apparitions, and all concluded that they could not confirm if a supernatural event had occurred.

In 2010, a papal commission was established by Pope Benedict XVI and led by Cardinal Camillo Ruini. While the commission's report was never officially made public, it was leaked by several journalists and Italian media.

Although the commission voted overwhelmingly to recognize the first seven apparitions of Mary in 1981, it expressed doubts over the thousands of Marian apparitions that have allegedly occurred since July 4, 1981, and supposedly continue to this day.

Some of the report's conclusions were also revealed by Pope Francis during his flight to Rome from Fatima, Portugal, in May 2017, when he spoke about the commission's work.

Although the pope acknowledged that pilgrims who visit Medjugorje deserve spiritual care and support, he expressed doubts about claims of the continuing apparitions of Mary.

"On the apparitions, the presumed current apparitions: the report has its doubts. I personally am meaner," the pope said, according to the English translation posted on the Vatican website.

"I prefer the Madonna as Mother, our Mother, and not a woman who's the head of a telegraphic office, who sends a message every day at a certain time. This is not the Mother of Jesus. And these presumed apparitions do not have much value. This I say as a personal opinion," he said.

Nevertheless, in 2024, Pope Francis approved devotions at Medjugorje without officially weighing in on the alleged apparitions.

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

Those Targeted by Immigration Enforcement Need 'Chance to be Heard,' Says Nun Detained by ICE

By Gina Christian

(OSV News) — Give those targeted in immigration enforcement operations "the chance to be heard," said a religious sister detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents for several hours June 28, amid an intended third-country deportation effort.

On July 23, Sister Leticia Ugboaja delivered a prepared statement during a press conference hosted by Our Lady of Sorrows Church in McAllen, Texas, located at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Almost a month prior to the media event, Sister Leticia had been walking to Sunday Mass at the church, dressed in her religious habit, when ICE agents accosted and detained her. She was released after several hours following the intervention of several congressional representatives.

Accompanying Sister Leticia at the press conference were her attorney, Carlos Moctezuma García, and Sister Norma Pimentel, a member of the Missionaries of Jesus and executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley, located in the Diocese of Brownsville, Texas. The diocese uploaded a recording of the full press conference to its YouTube channel.

At the press conference, Sister Leticia — a member of the Daughters of Mary Mother of Mercy, a congregation founded in Nigeria, and a registered nurse who has worked in local healthcare for more than a decade — recounted her experience in English, with Sister Norma providing a Spanish translation of the statement.

García then explained his client's immigration status, saying that in 2019, a judge denied Sister Leticia's petition for asylum.

Yet "in that same decision," he said, the judge "granted her protection from removal to Nigeria" under the United Nations' convention against torture, "finding she had met the high legal standard required to show it was more likely than not that she would face torture if returned there."

Over the past several years, Nigeria has seen ongoing violence against both Christians and Muslims by Islamic extremists. Kidnappings of Catholic women religious were documented in 2017 and 2018, ahead of Sister Leticia's asylum denial.

Although the judge's removal protection "legally bars" the U.S. from deporting her to Nigeria, he said, Sister Leticia "remains as a technical matter under a final order of removal."

However, García clarified, "she has done everything the law has asked of her," and holds "a valid employment authorization document" while attending all required appointments with immigration officials.

OSV News photo/Our Lady of Sorrows Church, Facebook

Sister Leticia Ugboaja, a member of the Daughters of Mary Mother of Mercy, is pictured in an undated photo posted on Facebook by Our Lady of Sorrows Parish in McAllen, Texas. Sister Leticia, who was taken into custody June 28 by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents, spoke to the media about her experience during a July 23 news conference at the Texas parish where she ministers.

He said that her June 28 detention was part of an attempt to remove Sister Leticia "not to Nigeria but to a third country," a move that marks both "a separate legal pathway from the one her protection forecloses," and "the subject of active litigation in federal courts nationwide."

García said his client has a July 28 appointment with immigration officials, and expressed the hope that an ankle monitor would not be placed on Sister Leticia as part of that process.

Sister Leticia recalled that as she walked to the church, she was meditating on the Mass readings and preparing to serve as an extraordinary minister of holy Communion when agents stopped her.

"Honestly, in that moment, I did not understand what was going on, what was happening to me," she said. "I was very much afraid, with cold sweat. I could just hear my heart, very tachycardic."

Her long record of living and serving in the McAllen area compounded her disorientation.

"I have been in this community … more than a decade," she said. "I have cared for the sick as a nurse in various hospitals. I did not expect (to be accosted by immigration enforcement) on an ordinary Sunday morning, when people should be ready to go to Mass, to worship the Lord, on the street here, just in front of the school. I have walked here, passed by this same road countless number of times."

Her voice filled with emotion as she described being denied the opportunity to attend Mass.

"As we all know, Sunday Mass is obligatory," she said. "And we have to attend Mass every day if you can. … And for me, not to go to Mass on Sunday, not to receive Communion, it was very, very heartbreaking for me."

Sister Leticia had even implored the immigration enforcement agents for the chance to first attend the liturgy and receive holy Communion.

But "even when I told (them), 'Can I go to Mass; can I just attend Mass, can I receive Communion?', the answer was 'no,'" said Sister Leticia.

She also described feeling vulnerable as "just a small woman, a nun" with "my rosary, my key and my phone" amid "two men" who were "armed."

The experience is "still hurting me up to today," she said.

Saying she had "prayed a great deal" since her detention, Sister Leticia stressed that her experience was not unique.

"I am not the only one," she said. "There are many others in this same situation — people who have been given some form of protection under our laws, who have followed every rule asked of them, and who still live with uncertainty about where they might be sent, and whether anyone will tell them before it happens."

Sister Leticia stressed that her faith "teaches me not to be silent," since neither silence nor fear will "solve any problem."

"I'm speaking this out of peace and honesty in my heart," she said. "What I am asking is just simple. Before anyone, anyone, anyone is being taken into custody, or being taken anywhere — from home, from their parishes, from their places of work, or even walking on the streets — just .. give them the chance, give them the opportunity, so that they can be heard."

Sister Leticia added, "I believe every person in this situation like me deserves to be heard, deserves to be listened to, deserves to be given attention and opportunity, and to give them another chance to say what they have (to say)."

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

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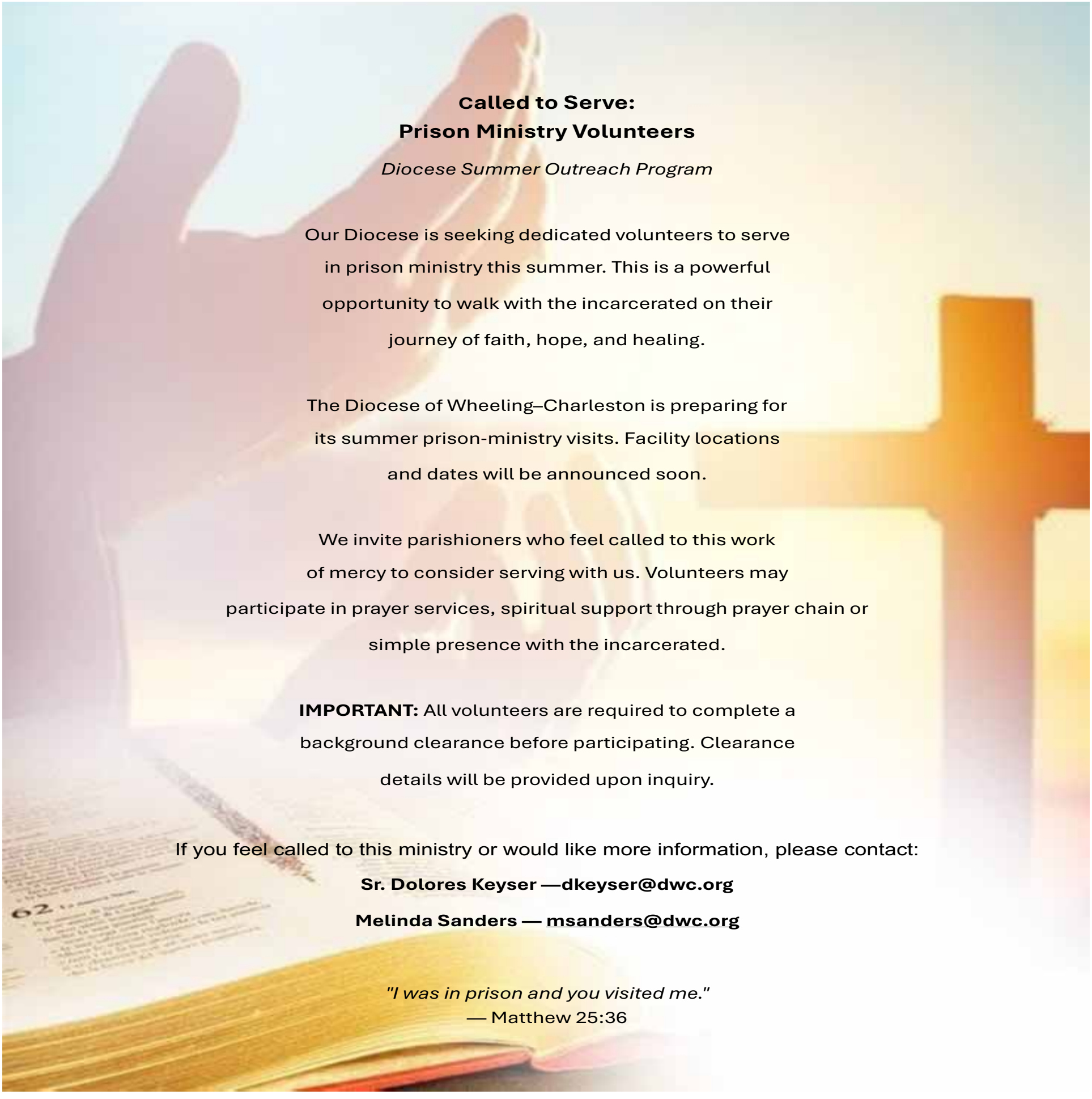

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Diocese Summer Outreach Program

Our Diocese is seeking dedicated volunteers to serve in prison ministry this summer. This is a powerful opportunity to walk with the incarcerated on their journey of faith, hope, and healing.

The Diocese of Wheeling–Charleston is preparing for its summer prison-ministry visits. Facility locations and dates will be announced soon.

We invite parishioners who feel called to this work of mercy to consider serving with us. Volunteers may participate in prayer services, spiritual support through prayer chain or simple presence with the incarcerated.

IMPORTANT: All volunteers are required to complete a background clearance before participating. Clearance details will be provided upon inquiry.

If you feel called to this ministry or would like more information, please contact:

Sr. Dolores Keyser —dkeyser@dwc.org

Melinda Sanders — msanders@dwc.org

"I was in prison and you visited me."
— Matthew 25:36

Obispos de EEUU hacen un llamado a la oración y a la acción a nivel nacional ante el aumento de la tasa de abortos

WASHINGTON (OSV News) —Los obispos católicos de EE.UU. lanzaron el 27 de julio un llamado a nivel nacional a la oración y a la acción ante el aumento de la tasa de abortos y la mayor disponibilidad de un fármaco abortivo.

"Todo aborto implica la muerte de un niño y un daño para la madre. Ahora, con un acceso más fácil a las píldoras abortivas, la tasa de abortos está aumentando trágicamente, junto con mayores riesgos para la salud", escribieron el arzobispo Paul S. Coakley, de Oklahoma City, presidente de la Conferencia de Obispos Católicos de Estados Unidos (USCCB, por sus siglas en inglés), y el obispo Daniel E. Thomas, de Toledo, Ohio, presidente del Comité de Actividades Pro-Vida de la USCCB, en un anuncio conjunto en el que hicieron un llamado a la oración y a la acción.

La política federal que permite la distribución por correo de la mifepristona --a veces denominada "píldora abortiva"-- promulgada inicialmente por la Administración Biden, ha sido mantenida hasta la fecha por la segunda Administración Trump.

El Departamento de Justicia, bajo la actual administración de Trump, ha intentado bloquear los recursos presentados por los estados contra esta política, a la espera de una revisión de seguridad prometida por la Administración de Alimentos y Medicamentos (FDA, por sus siglas en inglés). Sin embargo, el estado y el calendario de dicha revisión de la FDA no están claros.

El arzobispo Coakley y el obispo Thomas señalaron que la FDA "ha propiciado una industria del aborto por correo a escala nacional al permitir que las píldoras abortivas se receten en consultas de telesalud y se vendan tanto en farmacias de barrio como por Internet, eludiendo las leyes estatales que protegen la vida en el útero".

"Esto deja a las mujeres en una situación vulnerable, expuestas a sufrir un aborto solas en casa, sin ningún tipo de supervisión médica", afirmaron. "Además, crea nuevas oportunidades de explotación por parte de parejas violentas o traficantes de personas".

Los obispos afirmaron que, desde ahora hasta finales de octubre, momento en el que la Iglesia de EE.UU. celebra el Mes del Respeto a la Vida, "el Comité de Actividades Pro-Vida de la USCCB invita a los católicos a sumarse a un esfuerzo específico de oración y acción para detener la difusión de las píldoras abortivas".

Instaron a los católicos a recurrir a "la intercesión de San José, Defensor de la Vida", así como a enviar mensajes a las farmacias y empresas farmacéuticas implicadas.

NOTAS: La oración por el respeto a la vida dirigida a San José está disponible en Español (https://es.respectlife.org/prayer-to-st-joseph) y en inglés (https://www.respectlife.org/prayer-to-st-joseph). Para obtener más información sobre cómo sumarse a la campaña de acción de la USCCB, haz clic: aquí: https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/sl/iLd6hbl

Foto OSV News/cortesía de la Arquidiócesis de Oklahoma City y la Diócesis de Toledo

El arzobispo Paul S. Coakley, de Oklahoma City, presidente de la Conferencia de Obispos Católicos de Estados Unidos (USCCB), y el obispo Daniel E. Thomas, de Toledo, Ohio, presidente del Comité de Actividades Pro-Vida de la USCCB, aparecen en una foto compuesta. En una carta publicada el 27 de julio de 2026, los obispos lanzaron un llamado a nivel nacional a la oración y a la acción desde ahora hasta finales de octubre, el Mes del Respeto a la Vida, para frenar la propagación de las píldoras abortivas.

Para denunciar presuntos casos de abuso sexual de menores:

La diócesis de Wheeling-Charleston te exhorta a denunciar cualquier delito ante las autoridades civiles. Para realizar una denuncia en contra de cualquier obispo en todos los Estado Unidos, favor de reportarlo en la página web www.repostbishopabuse.org. Y si, además, existen motivos para creer que un obispo ha cometido alguna conducta sexual inapropiada favor de comunicarse con las autoridades civiles de la jurisdicción correspondiente y también puede realizar un reporte en la página web antes mencionada. **Para informar a las autoridades civiles:** comuníquese con la policía local; los números varían según su ubicación. Si considera que alguien está en peligro inmediato, favor de llamar al 911. Para informar de forma confidencial sobre cualquier sospecha de abuso o negligencia infantil, incluido el abuso sexual, favor de comunicarse con la Oficina de Servicios de Protección Infantil de Niños y Familias de West Virginia, llamando a la línea directa de abuso infantil al 1-800.352.6513. **Para informar a las autoridades diocesanas:** La diócesis exhorta a informar primeramente a las autoridades civiles correspondientes, cuando la denuncia incluye un delito, y también alienta a informar a las autoridades eclesiásticas correspondientes. Para reportar casos sospechosos de abuso sexual de menores por parte del personal de la Diócesis de Wheeling-Charleston, comuníquese directamente con la diócesis a los teléfonos 1.888.434.6237 o 304.233.0880 para hablar con cualquiera de las siguientes personas asignadas: Sr. Bryan Minor, ext. 263; Sr. Tim Bishop, ext. 353; y si desea hablar en español con Sor Martha Gómez, ext. 264. También puede llamar a la Oficina de Ambiente Seguro de la diócesis al 304.230.1504 o a la línea directa de abuso sexual de la diócesis al 833.230.5656. Los formularios de quejas están disponibles en línea en la página web www.dwc.org, favor de hacer clic en "Diócesis" en la barra de menú, luego en "Oficinas", en "Ambiente seguro" y en "Descargar archivos y formularios". El formulario se titula "Formulario de queja para denuncias de abuso sexual de menores". El formulario se puede enviar por correo en Estados Unidos a: Office of Safe Environment, Diocesis of Wheeling-Charleston, PO Box 230, Wheeling WV 26003. **Para informar al Coordinador de Asistencia a Víctimas de la Diócesis:** Favor de llamar a Erin McFarland, M.Ed., LPC, al 304.559.6742. Además de las vías mencionadas anteriormente para denunciar el abuso sexual, la diócesis se ha asociado con la compañía Navex Global que ofrecer la plataforma EthicsPoint para informar cualquier inquietud adicional, como sospecha de mala conducta financiera, profesional y personal de un sacerdote, diacono, religioso, o empleado laico de la diócesis o cualquier parroquia o escuela católica en West Virginia. Puede acceder a la plataforma EthicsPoint a través de la página web www.dwc.org, en "Rendición de cuentas", luego "Informar mala conducta" o llamando al 844.723.8381. EthicsPoint es una herramienta de denuncia confidencial y anónima, ellos se encargarán de transmitir su denuncia directamente a las autoridades civiles y a las autoridades diocesanas correspondientes, y lo más importante al denunciar a través de ellos, la identidad de la persona que denuncia está protegida. **Enlaces e información:** Departamento de Salud y Recursos Humanos de WV: https://www.wvdhhr.org/report.asp. Policía Estatal de Virginia Occidental, Unidad de crímenes contra a menores: 304-293-6400.

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