

THE CATHOLIC  
*Spirit*

# Most Reverend Evelio Menjivar-Ayala

## Named 10th Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston

**WHEELING**—The Holy Father Pope Leo XIV has accepted the resignation of Most Reverend Mark E. Brennan from the pastoral governance of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston and has appointed as Bishop of that Diocese the Most Reverend Evelio Menjivar-Ayala, currently Auxiliary Bishop of Washington. The appointment was publicized in Washington D.C. on May 1, 2026, by Cardinal Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States.

Bishop-designate Menjivar-Ayala, 56, will serve as the tenth Bishop of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston.

Bishop Menjivar will succeed Bishop Mark Brennan, 79, who will remain as apostolic administrator of the diocese through July 1. The Mass of Installation will be celebrated on July 2, 2026, at 2:00 P.M., at the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Wheeling.

Bishop Evelio Menjivar was born August 14, 1970, in Chalatenango, El Salvador. He migrated to the United States in 1990 and in 2023 became Auxiliary Bishop for the Archdiocese of Washington, notably the first Salvadoran bishop in the country.

Bishop Menjivar attended St. John Vianney College Seminary in Miami, Florida, receiving a bachelor's degree in philosophy. He attended the North American College in Rome and obtained a master's degree in theology from the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas in Rome ("Angelicum") in 2002. He pursued licentiate studies at the Pontifical Scalabrinian Institute for Pastoral

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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. The Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston's Safe Environment Program consists of the following components for persons seeking employment or to volunteer, directly or indirectly, with children: background check; receipt of the Diocese's Policy Relating to Sexual Abuse of Children; sexual abuse awareness training for adults. Training may be completed online or via live workshop. For information, go to [www.dwc.org](http://www.dwc.org), click "Diocese", then "Offices," then "Office of Safe Environment."

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

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**The Catholic Spirit's Print Schedule for 2026**

There are 10 print editions in 2026. At right are the names of the issues and the publishing dates. Please note, the publishing dates may or may not be on feast days. Digital issues are published every Friday, delivered by e-mail to subscribers, and posted on [thecatholicspiritwv.org](http://thecatholicspiritwv.org).

**2026 Print Dates:**  
 Month of Mary, Mother of God, May 15  
 Month of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, June 12  
 Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, August 14  
 Triumph of the Cross, September 11  
 Month of the Rosary, October 9  
 Advent, November 20  
 Christmas, December 18

## Bishop ...

### Cont'd from Page 1

Theology for Human Mobility in Rome before his ordination. He was ordained to the priesthood for The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington on May 29, 2004.

Bishop Menjivar's assignments in The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington have included posts as parochial vicar at Mother Seton Catholic Church in Germantown; St. Bartholomew Catholic Church in Bethesda; the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington; and as pastor of Our Lady Queen of the Americas Catholic Church in Washington. From 2017 to 2023, he served as pastor of St. Mary's Catholic Church in Landover Hills. He speaks English, Spanish, and Italian.

He previously served as dean of Middle Prince George's County Deanery and was also a member of the Archdiocesan Child Protection Advisory Board. In 2023, Cardinal Wilton Gregory named him Vicar General of The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington. He currently is a member of the Priest Personnel Board, Administrative Board, the College of Consultors, and the Priest Council. He also serves as a member of the Board of Directors of the Maryland Catholic Conference, Catholic Charities and Catholic Relief Services. He is also the Episcopal Moderator of the National Catholic Ecclesial Movements and Member of the USCCB Committee on Communications.

In 2024, he was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from Georgetown University. Throughout his mini-

stry, he has actively supported workers and continues to promote social justice for immigrants.

Bishop Menjivar was ordained as an auxiliary bishop of Washington on February 21, 2023, by Cardinal Wilton Gregory at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle.

Bishop Brennan who has served the WV diocese since August 22,

2019, expressed his confidence in Bishop-designate Menjivar's leadership.

"Many faithful across the diocese and I have prayed to God for a true shepherd of the people to lead our diocese into the future. I truly believe God has answered our prayers with the appointment of Bishop Evelio Menjivar," Bishop

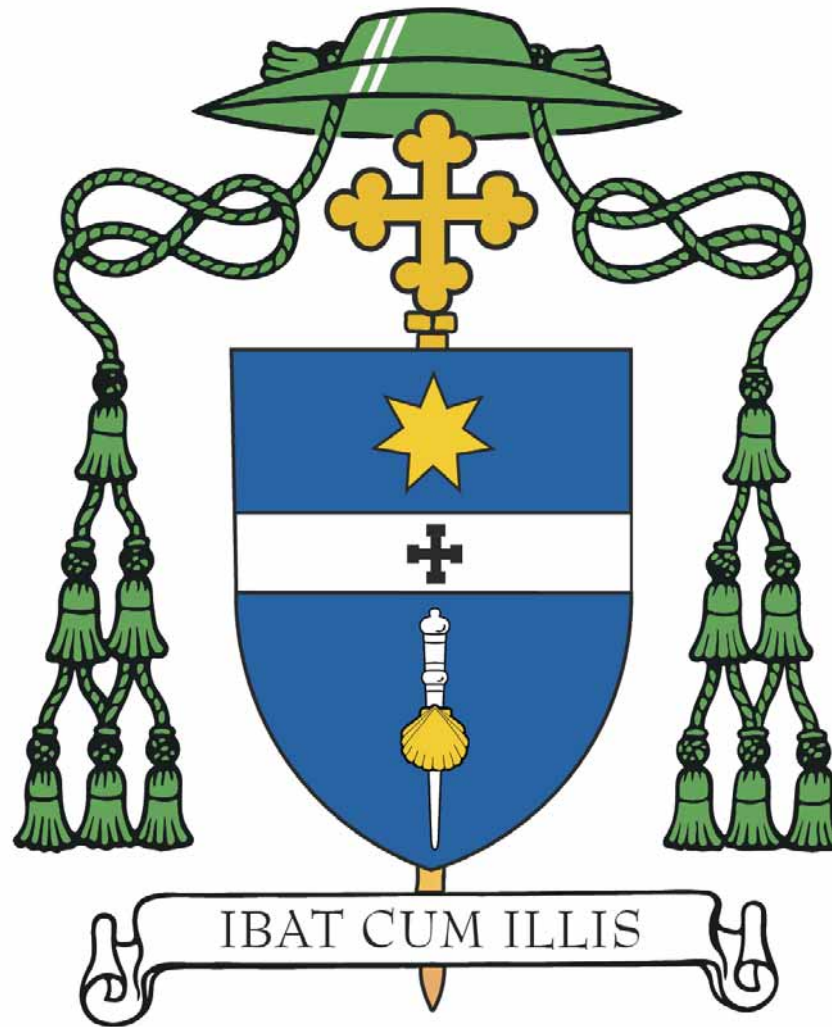
Brennan said.

Bishop Emeritus Mark Brennan has served the diocese faithfully as a true "boots-on-the-ground" shepherd, walking with and listening to his flock, while proclaiming the Gospel with compassion, clarity, and pastoral charity. His episcopacy has been highlighted by broader lay participation in the Church's life and mission, by re-assembling the lay led diocesan pastoral council for collaboration, dialogue, and discernment among clergy, religious, and laity as well as a creating a more vibrant role for the diocesan finance council. At the same time, we have been blessed by an increase of vocations to the priesthood and diaconate life and have strengthened our encouragement to the consecrated life.

He has given the Church a consistent national voice in defense of the rights of the unborn and the vulnerable, affirming the dignity of women and the protection due to children as well as standing up to defend the rights of immigrants.

Bishop Brennan has also been a true friend of Catholic education at all levels across the state. Since 2019, the diocese has expanded classes in several schools and is opening a new high school in the Eastern Panhandle. He has also been a staunch supporter of Catholic Institutions of Higher Learning, including Wheeling University and Catholic Distance University.

(Cover photo of Bishop Evelio Menjivar-Ayala and the image of his Coat of Arms on this page are courtesy of the Archdiocese of Washington.)



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# One Mission One Day to Make a Difference for Catholic Schools Will be Held May 5

By Colleen Rowan

**WEST VIRGINIA** — Catholic schools of the diocese have big plans for donations they receive through the annual One Mission One Day (OMOD) to Make a Difference campaign on May 5.

Heidi Sforza, director of Annual Giving for the diocese, said OMOD “is a powerful reminder of what our Catholic school community can accomplish when we come together with a shared purpose. The impact of this day reaches every corner of our schools—supporting things like playground improvements, enhanced safety measures, teacher recognition, ministry programs, and academic growth opportunities.”

The diocese’s seven Catholic high schools and 18 Catholic elementary and grade schools as well as Wheeling University, which is participating for the first time, have detailed plans in their profiles on the OMOD website (<https://www.onemissiononeday.org>) so donors can see exactly what their gifts will help support.

Madonna High School in Weirton is hoping for 100 percent participation from its families and supporters.

“Help us reach our goal of \$15,000!” school officials say in Madonna’s profile on the OMOD website. All donations will directly support the continued maintenance and upkeep of the school’s facility, “including important security enhancements—helping us provide a safe and welcoming environment for our students.”

Central Catholic High School in Wheeling is raising money for its newly formed Campus Ministry Fund.

“This initiative seeks to ensure



**One Mission One Day (OMOD) to Make a Difference for Catholic schools will be held May 5. Pictured are students from one of those schools. They are the Raleigh County Social Studies Fair winners from St. Francis de Sales School in Beckley. In the front, from left, are Francie Lewis (second place), Asher Tanveer (first place), Julianna Haddadin, and Rorie Wilks (third place). In the back, from left, are Rajeev Polisetty (third place), Asad Tanveer (first place), Ria Asaithambi (second place), and Emma Campbell (third place).**

that every student can fully participate in the faith experiences that shape their lives. The Campus Ministry Fund will support retreats, service learning opportunities, liturgical celebrations, sacramental preparation, and outreach programs that en-

courage students to live out the Gospel and our mission in meaningful and lasting ways,” the school’s profile states.

Parkersburg Catholic High School and Elementary School are focusing on the recently launched three-year

campaign, “Blueprint for the Future.” According to the schools’ profiles, the campaign focuses specifically on increasing enrollment across the three campuses, providing scholarship and financial aid opportunities for new  
**See “OMOD” on Page 6**

Courtesy photo



Courtesy photos

One Mission One Day (OMOD) to Make a Difference for Catholic schools will be held May 5. Pictured are students from some of those schools. Clockwise from left: Students from Ss. Peter and Paul Catholic School in Oak Hill are altar servers at a school Mass; students build critter-bots in the STEM lab at St. Paul School in Weirton; Wheeling Central Catholic High School students are pictured after Ash Wednesday Mass; members of Parkersburg Catholic High School's class of 2025 are shown at graduation; and AP environmental science students at St. Joseph Central Catholic High School in Huntington learn about waste water treatment at the Huntington Waste Water Plant.

## OMOD ...

**Cont'd from Page 5**

and existing families.

St. Joseph Central Catholic High School in Huntington hopes to install a digital display board in the school lobby. "Its purpose will be to showcase many facets of our school, including academics, athletics, yearbooks, graduations, hall of fame, alumni, sponsors, special events and much, much more," the school's profile states.

Other initiatives cover a range of needs. Charleston Catholic High School will use funds to support cosmetic updates to the commons and bathrooms, while St. Patrick Catholic School in Weston is looking to install a modern security system. Replacing and upgrading the air-conditioning units is the goal for Ss. Peter and Paul Catholic School in Oak Hill and St. Francis of Assisi School in St. Albans plans to use funding to continue development of its playground, including

the purchase of additional property, equipment, facilities, and fencing to ensure all safety requirements are met.

These are just a few of the projects planned. To find a particular school, read about its initiative, and make a donation, visit the OMOD website (<https://www.one-missiononeday.org>) and click "Donate."

As the campaign nears, Sforza is looking forward to all that makes it not only a day that brings in extra support for the schools but one that is so enjoyable for everyone involved.

"Beyond the funding, what makes this day truly special is the joy and energy our schools bring to it," she said. "It's an absolute privilege to work alongside them and witness the creativity, dedication, and spirit they pour into making it a meaningful and fun experience for students, families, and alumni. Seeing it all come together each year is incredibly inspiring."

- ✓ Strengthen our Schools
- ✓ Support our Students
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Tuesday  
May 5, 2026

One Mission One Day  
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# Celebrate Religious Brothers Day

**By Sister Martha Gomez, RGS, Delegate for Consecrated Life**

Every year on May 1, the Church celebrates "Religious Brothers Day." We invite you to take a moment in this month of May to recognize those men who live the Gospel in a unique way by consecrating their lives to the service of God for others.

We have in our Diocese the presence of the Marist Brothers who come from different branches but have the same roots. Let us express our gratitude not only for their service but for their presence among us.

Brother John Byrd, F.M.S., of the Marist Brothers of the Schools' US

Province served for many years at our Bishop Donahue Catholic High School and continues to be an active member of the Cathedral of St. Joseph. He is a co-founder of the South Wheeling Preservation Alliance, a master gardener, and a promoter of planting trees in the city.

In late 2025, our dear Brother John McDonagh, F.M.S., left us to go to their headquarters in N.Y. for a well-deserved retirement. Brother John served in the education field for many years. Those of us in the Wheeling area will remember him in his ministry as a kind and thoughtful Chaplain at Wheeling Hospital and Liza's Place (Hos-



Courtesy photo  
**Brother John McDonagh, FMS (left), and Brother John Byrd, FMS, are pictured.**

pice). His wisdom and kindness will never be forgotten.

The last but not the least – we have in our midst Brother Roy Madigan, S.M., of the Marist Priests and Brothers Society. Brother

Roy worked at Holy Rosary Parish in Buckhannon, WV, for many years in a variety of ministries including helping in soup kitchens and reaching out to the poor. Currently, he is an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion at Good Shepherd Nursing Home in Wheeling where he brings Communion to the residents who cannot attend Mass. He spends time with each resident, talking with them and inquiring about their well-being. He is noted for the time he takes with each resident. In his unique way, he makes them feel important and loved. He is known for being compassionate and treating each resident with dignity and re-



Courtesy photo  
**Brother Roy Madigan, S.M.**

spect.

These fine gentlemen truly reflect their Marist Charism of radiating the Lord's mercy, compassion, and kindness to all who they meet.

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**TIME:**  
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**QUESTIONS:**  
lpierce@ccwva.org  
idyer@ccwva.org

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CCUSA's copyrighted and accredited Essentials for Disaster Case Managers two-day training provides the 10 essential topics a disaster case manager needs to know about in order to ensure success. The training provides opportunities to apply and practice this knowledge with in-class activities.

- Attendees are required to attend both days to receive a CCUSA Disaster Case Management Certification.
- Lunch is provided.
- The training is limited at 35 participants (Limit 3 participants per agency).
- Priority will be given to nonprofits providing case management to disaster victims.
- CEC's eligible

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- Supervisors of disaster case managers
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- Community members interested in volunteer disaster case management

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# Two Wheeling University Employees Join Catholic Faith during Mass at the Chapel of Mary and Joseph

**WHEELING** — Two members of the Wheeling University community, Men's Basketball Coach, Chris Richardson, and Director of Music, Robert Troeger, were fully received as members of the Catholic church on Sunday, April 12.

During the Mass, Father David Griffin, director of Campus Ministry, presided.

The two men had been participating in the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA) for several months, meeting regularly with Father Griffin to prepare them to be confirmed and to receive the Eucharist.

"New members are welcomed during the Easter season. Bishop Mark Brennan gave us approval to welcome Chris and Bob during this Mass at the chapel because of their affiliation with the university," Father Griffin said. "This was a true celebration."

Richardson explained, "This was a part of my life that hadn't been filled, yet. Finding a home in the Church has added greatly to my life already ... The process and experience have been extremely rewarding. It's helped me to look at myself and my daily life through a more rigorous lens, helping me understand the impor-

ance of spiritual structure as a father and a leader. And most of all, it's brought me closer to God than I've ever been in my life. I know my relationship with God will only continue to grow."

"But in truth, it has been the people and the practice of the faith that has made me decide to formalize and confirm. I have always been impressed by the enormity of this global Church, its limitless diversity, and its warm sense of belonging wherever one happens to be on this planet. I am blessed in recent years to have learned and studied the witness of St. Pier Giorgio Frassati whose life of sacrifice, duty, and dedication in the 20th century has been more than an inspiration. And to say that I am delighted with the coming of Pope Leo goes without saying. I am making the choice to step inside, all the while knowing the way has been prepared and cleared for quite some time," Troeger said.

Members of the Wheeling University community and family were also present to celebrate the occasion. Following the Mass, a reception was held on campus for the families and all those who witnessed the celebration.



Courtesy photo

Two members of the Wheeling University community, Robert Troeger (second from left) and Christopher Richardson (third from left), were received into the Catholic Church Sunday, April 13. University President, Dianna M. Vargo, Ed.D. (left), and Director of Campus Ministry, Father David Griffin (right), welcomed the two men into the faith following Mass in the Chapel of Mary and Joseph.

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Participants will explore the theological foundations of parish pastoral councils, clarify roles and responsibilities, and grow in prayerful discernment and collaboration. The course also includes reflection questions and real-world applications to strengthen parish leadership.

Available for just \$10 per participant, this accessible course is a valuable resource for both new and experienced council members. A companion book is also available to further enrich the learning experience. Many parishes may wish to provide copies to council members to complement the online course and for further education. Click here to learn more: [https://learning.catholicformationonline.com/home.aspx?pagename=ext\\_productCAC&PID=125854](https://learning.catholicformationonline.com/home.aspx?pagename=ext_productCAC&PID=125854)

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Contact Sister Dolores Keyser, E.S.E.H. at [dkeyser@dwc.org](mailto:dkeyser@dwc.org) or call 304-233-0880, ext. 316. Let's break the chains together.

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# Anglicans, Catholics Must Work to Overcome Differences, Pope Tells Archbishop of Canterbury

By Junno Arocho Esteves

**(OSV News)** — Although the path to full communion has become “more difficult to discern,” Catholics and Anglicans must continue on the path of dialogue and “proclaim Christ to the world,” Pope Leo XIV said in his first meeting with Anglican Archbishop Sarah Mullally of Canterbury.

In his address to Archbishop Mullally during her visit to the Vatican April 27, the pope acknowledged that while much progress has been made on “historically divisive issues, new problems have arisen in recent decades” which have made the “ecumenical journey” more challenging.

Nevertheless, he said, it “would also be a scandal if we did not continue to work towards overcoming our differences, no matter how intractable they may appear.”

According to a statement by the archbishop’s office, Archbishop Mullally joined the pope for midday prayer in the 17th-century Chapel of Urban VIII, located in the Apostolic Palace.

Welcoming the archbishop of Canterbury to the Vatican, Pope Leo noted that while “our suffering world greatly needs the peace of Christ, the divisions among Christians weakens our capacity to be effective bearers of that peace.”

“If the world is to take our preaching to heart, we must, therefore, be constant in our prayers and efforts to remove any stumbling blocks that hinder the proclamation of the Gospel,” the pope said. “This focus on the need for unity for the sake of a more fruitful evangelization has been a theme throughout my own ministry; indeed it is reflected in the motto I chose when

I became a bishop: ‘In Illo uno unum’, ‘In the One — that is Christ — we are one.’”

While the ecumenical path of communion is complicated, Pope Leo said the Catholic Church and the Church of England continue to “journey together in friendship and dialogue.”

He also prayed that the Holy Spirit, “whom the Lord breathed on the disciples on the evening after his resurrection, will guide our steps as we prayerfully and humbly seek the unity which is the Lord’s will for all his disciples.”

“Your Grace, in thanking you for your visit today, I pray that the same Holy Spirit will remain with you always, making you fruitful in the service to which you have been called,” the pope said.

In her address to Pope Leo, which was published by her office, Archbishop Mullally expressed her gratitude to him for speaking “about the many injustices in our world,” especially during his recent apostolic journey in Africa.

“The world needed this message at this time — thank you,” she said. “It reminded us that despite our sufferings, people long for life in all its fullness, and countless people are working each day for this vision of the common good.”

The archbishop of Canterbury noted that in the ecumenical journey embarked upon by Catholics and Anglicans, the “Holy Spirit is inviting us into a deeper practice of hospitality, not simply as welcome, but as a form of ministry.”

It is “a willingness to make space for one another as those created in the image of God and called to grow more



OSV News photo/Simone Risoluti, Vatican Media  
Pope Leo XIV poses with Anglican Archbishop Sarah Mullally of Canterbury during their meeting at the Vatican April 27.

fully into his likeness,” she said. “Already, we receive from one another gifts we cannot generate alone: depth in prayer, courage in witness, perseverance in suffering, and faithfulness in service. In these, our common witness is strengthened.”

Recalling King Charles III and Queen Camilla’s visit to the Vatican in October, Archbishop Mullally said the British monarch “valued his recent visit” and assured Pope Leo “of a warm welcome from the Church of England should you honor the United Kingdom with a visit.”

Appointed as archbishop of Canterbury by King Charles in October, Archbishop Mullally is the Church of England’s first female to lead the Anglicans “in its 1,400-year history,” the Diocese of Canterbury said.

Anglicans claim 1,400 years of history because they identify the Church of England not as a new entity created during the 16th-century Reformation, but as the continuation of the church established in England by a Catholic saint — St. Augustine of Canterbury — in A.D. 597.

Archbishop Mullally’s meeting with Pope Leo was part of a four-day pilgrimage to Rome, which, according to her office, is meant “to strengthen Anglican–Roman Catholic relations through prayer, personal encounter, and formal theological dialogue.”

“The archbishop of Canterbury’s visit takes place within the context of

the long-standing ecumenical relationship between the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church, rooted in the historic 1966 meeting between Archbishop Michael Ramsey and Pope Paul VI,” Anglican Communion News Service said.

The pilgrimage began April 26 with a visit to St. Peter’s Basilica and the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls in Rome to pray before the tombs of the apostles. In a tweet posted on X, Archbishop Mullally called for prayers “for the unity of his disciples and all God’s people.”

“Our world is deeply wounded by war, division and fear, and it longs for the peace, justice, reconciliation and hope that are found in Jesus Christ alone. We are called to proclaim and live this Gospel together, for the sake of the life of the world that God so loves,” she wrote.

In the evening, following her meeting with Pope Leo, Archbishop Mullally was to preside over vespers at the Church of St. Ignatius of Loyola, with Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, pro-prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization as homilist.

According to the archbishop’s office, Archbishop Mullally will appoint Anglican Bishop Anthony Ball, director of the Anglican Center in Rome, as her representative to the Holy See.

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

# U.S. Bishops' Head Calls For Prayer after Gunman Attacks White House Press Dinner Attended By Trump

By **Gina Christian**

**(OSV News)** — Following a gunman's attempted assault on the annual White House Correspondents' Association Dinner, forcing the evacuation of the president, first lady and members of the Cabinet, the head of the U.S. Catholic bishops' conference denounced the violence and called for all to resort to prayer.

"We are grateful the lives of the President, those who protect him, and everyone in attendance last night were spared from serious harm," Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said in a statement April 26.

"Let us all pray for our elected leaders and public officials that they may receive God's blessings," he said. "Because human life is a precious gift, there is no room for violence of any kind in our society."

President Donald Trump, first lady Melania Trump, Vice President JD Vance and several Cabinet members were whisked out of the annual dinner with the White House press corps April 25, after a man rushed toward the main ballroom where the event was held and briefly exchanged gunfire with law enforcement.

According to The Associated Press, witnesses at the Washington Hilton heard about five to eight gunshots. Law enforcement told AP the suspect opened fire before Secret Service agents subdued him. One Secret Service officer was hospitalized after the alleged gunman shot at his bullet-proof vest but was released the next morning, according to the agency.

Attendees — largely hundreds of journalists who cover the White House — took shelter under tables, with some providing moment-by-mo-

ment updates to their various outlets amid the confusion.

More details emerged in two evening press briefings held shortly after the ballroom had been cleared, with Trump speaking to reporters at the White House, flanked by Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin and FBI Director Kash Patel.

During the briefing, Trump said the Secret Service officer injured in the attack had been shot from a very close distance.

A separate briefing was subsequently held at the hotel, where Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser, Jeffrey Carroll, interim police chief of the city's Metropolitan Police Department, and federal law enforcement updated the media.

Bowser and Carroll said the suspect appeared to be a lone actor, with Carroll noting the individual had charged a Secret Service checkpoint outside the ballroom, "armed with a shotgun, a handgun and multiple knives," before being "intercepted" by Secret Service agents.

Carroll also confirmed that "law enforcement exchanged gunfire with the individual," although the suspect "was not struck."

U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia Jeanine Pirro, who was in attendance at the dinner, told media during the briefing that the suspect had so far been charged with two counts — using a firearm during a crime of violence, and assault on a federal officer using a dangerous weapon.

The suspect was scheduled to be arraigned in federal District Court on April 27, and Pirro said there will be "many more charges based upon the information that we are learning in this very fluid situation."

Media reports have identified the suspect as Cole Tomas Allen, 31, a video game developer and teacher from the Los

Angeles suburb of Torrance, California, who recently won a "teacher of the month" award.

After being evacuated, Trump posted on his platform Truth Social that "the shooter has been apprehended," and that he had "recommended that we 'LET THE SHOW GO ON.'"

He commended the Secret Service and law enforcement for acting "quickly and bravely."

Trump and the White House Correspondents' Association had initially wanted to continue with the program, but deferred to law enforcement's judgement to cancel the event and evacuate. The event is expected to be rescheduled within 30 days.

Tom Bateman, a State Department correspondent for BBC News, reported that one Secret Service agent described the ballroom as a "crime scene" while ordering attendees to vacate it.

The White House Correspondents' Association was founded in 1914, with its first dinner hosted in 1921. The association, which counts close to 900 members from almost 300 outlets, works to ensure robust journalistic coverage of the White House.

Shortly after the incident, Bishop David J. Bonnar of Youngstown, Ohio, released a statement deploring the attack and calling for prayer.

"The United States is built on freedom and respect for all. There is no room for violence that

endangers the life of any human being," said Bishop Bonnar.

"Moreover," he said, "the issue of gun violence must be addressed. Violence is never the answer."

Bishop Bonnar added, "We all must look deeper into the human heart to build each other up rather than tear each

other down. We pray for peace in moments of disagreement and discord."

"As we celebrate our 250th birthday may we live as a nation under God with liberty and justice for all," said Bishop Bonnar, who concluded with a prayer of petition: "For the healing of divisions in our country, that we might always strive to be one nation, under God, and that hatred and violence will be cast out from every heart in our land and throughout the world, let us pray to the Lord."

Bishop Robert E. Barron of Winona-Rochester, Minnesota, a member of the Trump administration's Religious Liberty Commission, posted a message on the X social media platform April 26, expressing his gratitude that the president and his entourage were unhurt.

"May I raise my voice against the viciousness and tribalism that are so prevalent on the internet and that contribute mightily to the violence we see in our political culture," he said. "Can we please remember that it is possible to disagree with a politician's ideas without demonizing and de-humanizing him? Jesus commended us to love our enemies, and that includes our ideological opponents."

Metropolitan Archbishop Borys A. Gudziak of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia told OSV News, "It is deeply disturbing that the culture and expression

of violence continues to spread in our culture, country, and globally."

He said the attack "only contributes to an anxiety that is ascendant" in the nation.

"We Eastern Catholics — who endure in Ukraine, in the Middle East, in India and elsewhere political violence — strongly condemn what happened in Washington," and "call all people to a personal and communal stance of peace," said the archbishop.

"Pope Leo, by his personal example of serenity and moral clarity, and by his prophetic words, has given us a contemporary encouragement to live the life of Jesus," he said, adding, "Let us say again and again, peace be with you."

Rob DeFrancesco, executive director of the Catholic Media Association, told OSV News the organization was "deeply unsettled by the attack."

"We are grateful to the brave men and women who stopped the assailant. We are also mindful that journalists today, including our own members, often work in environments where their profession puts them in danger," he said.

"Our mission is to share the truth in love," said DeFrancesco. "That mission requires a society where reporters can seek the truth without the threat of violence."

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



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# Department of Justice Accuses Biden Administration of Anti-Christian Bias in New Report

By **Kate Scanlon**

**WASHINGTON (OSV News)** — The Trump administration accused the Biden administration of “anti-Christian bias” in its approach to policy issues related to abortion, marriage and gender, among others, in a report published by the Department of Justice April 30. The report argued the Biden administration, in pursuit of its policy goals, “attempted to curtail liberty, trample disfavored beliefs, and tamper the ability of Christians to act in accordance with their sincerely held religious beliefs.”

“That is not to say that every actor in the Biden Administration held animus toward Christians,” it said. “Many identify as Christians. But Christianity is not monolithic, and within that faith tradition, Christians have hotly contested points of doctrine, biblical interpretation, and how faith should inform daily conduct since the earliest days of the religion.”

Biden, a regular Massgoer whose practice of Catholicism in his public life was the subject of debate and scrutiny, was sometimes at odds with the U.S. bishops during his presidency, most notably over his administration’s abortion policy.

The report argued the Biden administration carried out “biased enforcement” of the federal Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, or FACE Act, and pursued “more severe charges and significantly harsher sentences for peaceful pro-life defendants than violent pro-abortion defendants.” The Department of Justice earlier in April similarly released another report alleging the Biden administration “weaponized” the FACE Act, which was crafted to protect access to both reproductive health facilities and houses of worship.

Featured prominently in the report was the now-infamous January 2023 memo often referred to as the “Richmond Memo,” a controversial leaked and retracted FBI document that discussed “radical traditionalist” Catholics as those who may pose threats of racially or ethnically motivated violence.

That document drew a distinction between “radical traditionalist” Catholics as “separate and distinct” from “traditionalist Catholics,” who it described as Catholics who “simply prefer the Traditional Latin Mass and pre-Vatican II teachings.” The

same FBI memo noted that “conversely, deep-seated anti-Catholicism remains a characteristic of many far-right white nationalists.” Some of the groups named in the memo are not canonically recognized by the Catholic Church, including the Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary located in Richmond, New Hampshire. However, that memo was sharply criticized as anti-Catholic and promptly retracted.

The report alleged that an investigation that led to the lawful arrest of “career criminal Xavier Louis Lopez” for the possession of unlawful weapons also resulted in “the targeting of his priest and an entire Catholic sect to which Lopez happened to adhere.”

However, documents previously released during a congressional investigation of the memo suggest that agents were unfamiliar with the Society of St. Pius X, or SSPX, a religious order the Vatican has described as having an irregular communion with the rest of the Catholic Church. The subject appeared to have interest in the order, the documents suggested, and agents were seeking to understand the SSPX and its relationship to the Catholic Church, not that the order itself was under investigation.

Christopher Wray, the FBI director at the time that memo was written, was first nominated to that role by Trump in 2017. During congressional testimony in 2023, Wray described himself as “aghast” at its contents.

Although the task force was directed to focus on anti-Christian bias, the report argued that the issues it included “do not only affect Christians. Far from it.”

“If the federal government can discriminate and limit the rights of a majority group to such an extent, people of every faith — and even those of other minority affiliations — have cause for concern about their rights under future administrations,” it said. “To wield the force of government against certain viewpoints or the people who hold them is anathema to our constitutional system of government.”

“The American people deserve to know when this type of abuse happens and how it happens,” it added, “so they can demand better from the Executive Branch and its agencies under any administration.”

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

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# After Eucharistic Encounter, Dying Baby is Thriving One Year Later

By **Katie Yoder**

**(OSV News)** — As a fourth grader, Andrea Artz remembers praying that she would experience a Eucharistic miracle one day. She never imagined that, years later, she might witness one with her newborn daughter.

“We didn’t think she was going to make it,” Andrea said of her daughter Catherine, who nearly died after being born last year. “But we, my husband and I, were praying the rosary throughout the night, and I just felt God’s presence.”

“I felt like (God) said, ‘You know what? It’s going to be OK,’” she added. “And it was.”

Andrea, 24, and her husband, Wyatt, 25, spoke with OSV News about little Catherine’s incredible recovery in 2025 after a priest placed a Eucharistic host on her. The priest involved also spoke with OSV News. The Artz family — a Catholic family of six located in Gann Valley in central South Dakota — said their third daughter spent 107 days in the hospital before they could bring her home.

Since then, Catherine’s story has made local, medical and national entertainment news.

Today, Catherine is a healthy, thriving 1-year-old who is learning how to walk — and be a big sister. Wyatt and Andrea spoke days after welcoming their fourth baby (a fourth daughter) in early March. They remembered Catherine’s birth that happened just one year earlier.

## A struggle from the beginning

Catherine was born March 4, 2025, during a winter storm at Ortonville Area Health Services in Ortonville, Minnesota. Everything seemed normal, and the delivery went well. Wyatt and Andrea held Catherine for five minutes with



OSV News photo/courtesy Artz family  
Wyatt and Andrea Artz, are pictured in an undated photo with their three children Roselyn, Adeline and Catherine outside their home in Gann Valley, S.D. As a fourth grader, Andrea Artz remembers praying that she would experience a Eucharistic miracle one day. She never imagined that, years later, she might witness one with her newborn daughter Catherine.

skin-to-skin contact. Then, the doctors needed to weigh her and check her oxygen levels.

“They were very low,” Andrea remembered. “At first they kind of thought it was the machine, but then she started turning purple.”

Doctors placed Catherine on an oxygen mask all night. They tried to fly her to another hospital for better care, but the raging storm prevented it. They had to wait until the next morning to move Catherine to Sanford Children’s Hospital in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

In Sioux Falls, doctors diagnosed Catherine with pulmonary hypertension, a serious condition where high blood pressure in the lung arteries strains the heart. Doc-

tors also told the Artz family that Catherine’s ductus arteriosus, a fetal blood vessel, closed in utero, which was causing her to struggle with breathing.

Catherine was placed on nitric oxide gas, oxygen and 30 different medications. When nothing seemed to work, doctors also placed her on an ECMO (extracorporeal membrane oxygenation) machine, a form of life support that allows the heart and lungs to rest. Catherine remained on it for 13 days. Then she faced more challenges.

“They took her off, and she was stable but still not doing the greatest,” Andrea recalled. “They moved her back into the NICU (neonatal

intensive care unit), and then they found out that she had a UTI (urinary tract infection).”

At that point, Catherine “went downhill really fast.”

## Preparing to say good-bye

The day after Catherine was removed from the ECMO machine, the hospital prepared for the worst.

“My husband was sick at home at the time, and they even said, ‘Yeah, we understand he’s still sick, but he should probably come because it’s not looking good,’” Andrea said. “Her oxygen levels probably dipped down into like 35.”

At the time, Wyatt was battling a severe case of strep throat. He remembered receiving a phone call telling him to come as soon as possible. He described the scene when he arrived at the NICU.

“I remember seeing my mother-in-law standing in the hallway talking to like five or six doctors and nurses,” he said. “The whole hallway was just full of people right outside her door — and that was a pretty tough thing to see.”

Throughout the night, Wyatt and Andrea prayed the rosary.

## An encounter with Jesus

The day after her birth, on Ash Wednesday, Catherine had been baptized by a priest. Now, the Artz parents asked another priest — Andrea’s hometown priest — to come and bring them Holy Communion.

“From that point until the priest came, her numbers were very low and didn’t really come up,” Wyatt said of Catherine. “She wasn’t really getting any better.”

The priest, who asked to be identified as a priest of the Diocese of Sioux Falls, spoke with OSV News about visiting the Artz family in the hospital. He came after

**See “Baby” on Page 14**

## Baby ...

**Cont'd from Page 13**

already helping arrange for Catherine's baptism. He had known Andrea since she was 10 and Wyatt since he was in high school. He described them as loving parents and devout Catholics.

"For Wyatt and Andrea calling upon me to have the Eucharist brought to their daughter is such a powerful witness of their faith," he said. They wanted to know, "Can you bring Jesus into my daughter's room?"

The priest brought the Eucharist — Christ's body, blood, soul and divinity present under the appearance of bread — as well as the text of the Litany of the Infant of Prague and a miniature statue of the Infant of Prague.

When he arrived, he prayed the litany with the Artz parents and left the statue at the end of Catherine's bed. Before distributing holy Communion to Wyatt and Andrea, he placed the Eucharistic host on Catherine's bare chest.

He said this is not something he normally does. While he had placed the pyx holding the Eucharist on individuals before, this was the first time he placed the host itself on someone. Catherine's father, Wyatt, remembered the moment.

"Part of me was thinking, well, at least he

came, and she got to be in the presence of the Eucharist before she passed," he said. "I was kind of coming to the point where I was OK if she passed, because I just didn't want her to suffer anymore."

"On the other hand, I was also kind of hopeful," he added. "Maybe this is it. Maybe this is what will be the thing to make her get better."

During Catherine's struggle, the Artz parents also prayed for the intercession of Blessed Clare Bosatta, a 19th-century Italian religious sister who helped found the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence.

### Hope of recovery

After the host was placed on Catherine, she slowly started to improve, Andrea said. As her numbers began to rise, the Artz parents were uncertain about the extent of their daughter's recovery. Because Catherine's oxygen count had been so low, doctors expressed concern about severe brain damage.

"They were preparing us basically for her to be a vegetable," Andrea said. Then, "they did an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging), and her brain scan was completely normal."

The priest said he was not surprised when he learned of Catherine's recovery. While he knew

the Artz parents had been told to prepare for their baby's funeral, "God works in mysterious ways — and this would not be the first time."

First and foremost, he hoped that people who learn of Catherine's story realize the Eucharist is not bread. He said that oftentimes people leave the Catholic Church to join another church while believing they are all the same.

"The only place you're going to get the Eucharist is in the Catholic Church — and this is just one of the many multitudes of examples of the power of the Eucharist," he said.

### A life transformed

Today, Catherine is on only one medication and has no issues.

Her mother, Andrea, describes Catherine as a determined little girl who also has a silly side. She knows what she wants and loves playing with her sisters. She also still comes close to the Eucharist: Wyatt said he is the one who usually holds Catherine when he and Andrea line up to receive Holy Communion at Mass.

"I always think it's kind of fun taking Catherine up to Communion," he said. And, he added, he thinks Catherine enjoys it too.

(Katie Yoder is an OSV News correspondent. She writes from Maryland.)

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

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In **case management**, we walk alongside our clients in their journeys, providing support and resources to help them work toward their own unique goals.

With persistent effort, PJ pursued a Section 8 voucher through our local housing authority. When she was awarded the voucher, she collaborated with our support staff to find a suitable apartment and soon moved into her new home.

Her most recent visit was nothing short of inspiring. The change in PJ was astonishing. As she stood and spoke with us, she radiated a sense of safety and contentment. Her eyes sparkled with gratitude as she described the simple joys of her new home—turning on a light switch and seeing the room illuminate, having both cold and hot water from the faucet.

The joy she expressed for having a place of her own, where she could feel safe and have enough food, was profoundly moving. She repeatedly thanked us, but the truth is, PJ did the hard work herself. We were simply honored to be a part of her journey, offering support and encouragement along the way. Moments like these are beyond words. Seeing the genuine joy and gratitude in PJ's eyes for her new life is a priceless reminder of why we do what we do. We are incredibly grateful for the support we receive, which makes such transformations possible and helps us continue making a difference in people's lives.

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# Papal Trip put Spotlight on Local Injustices, Joy of Christian Faith, Pope Says

By Carol Glatz, Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY (CNS)

— Pope Leo XIV wanted his journey to Africa to highlight the serious injustices continuing there and propose a message of peace to a world marred by conflict and violations of international law.

“At the same time, the apostolic journey gave people in Africa a chance to make their voices heard and to express the joy of being God’s people,” he said.

As had been customary by his predecessors, Pope Leo used his first general audience after his April 13-23 trip to four nations in Africa to tell people about the purpose of his visit and what struck him most about his travels.

Addressing thousands of people in St. Peter’s Square April 29, Pope Leo said in English that his time there “was meant to offer the world a message of peace at a moment marked by conflicts and frequent violations of international law.”

“Along with the call for peace, I also denounced the grave injustices that exist in those countries that are so rich in natural resources, urging the international community to overcome neo-colonial attitudes and engage in authentic collaboration,” he said.

On his journey, the pope

visited Algeria, Cameroon, Angola and Equatorial Guinea.

“From the very beginning of my pontificate, I have thought about a journey in Africa,” he said in his main address in Italian. “I thank the Lord for granting me the opportunity to undertake it, as shepherd, to meet and encourage the people of God.”

In Algeria, a predominantly Muslim country, the pope said he wanted to “show the world that it is possible to live together as brothers and sisters, even of different religions, when we recognize ourselves as children of the same merciful Father.”

The northern African country is also the birthplace of his “spiritual father,” St. Augustine, and by “revisiting the roots of my spiritual identity,” it offered a way to highlight his legacy, he said. “He is a master in the search for God and for truth. A testimony that is more important than ever today for Christians and for every person.”

The other three countries were predominantly Christian, he said, and “I, therefore, found myself immersed in an atmosphere of celebration of the faith.”

It was also a bit similar to “what happened to Jesus with the crowds in Galilee:

He saw them thirsting and hungry for justice and proclaimed to them: ‘Blessed are the poor, blessed are the meek, blessed are the peacemakers,’” the pope said, “and, recognizing their faith, (Jesus) said, ‘You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.’”

In Cameroon, he told the crowds in St. Peter’s Square, he reinforced the call to work together for reconciliation and peace.

Like the rest of the continent, Cameroon is rich in natural and human resources, he said, but there needs to be: “a fair distribution of wealth”; more opportunities for young people; an end to “endemic corruption”; the promotion of integral and sustainable development; and a stop to “the various forms of neo-colonialism with far-sighted international cooperation.”

In Equatorial Guinea, he said, the people “have weathered the vicissitudes of their history” and “renewed with great enthusiasm their determination to walk together towards a future of hope.”

“I cannot forget what happened in the prison in Bata,” he said, saying he “had never seen anything like it.”

“The prisoners sang at the top of their voices a song of thanksgiving to God and to the pope, asking him to pray ‘for their sins and their freedom,’” and then “they prayed the ‘Our Father’ with me in the pouring rain. A genuine sign of the Kingdom of God!”

Remarking on Angola overcoming its troubled period of civil war, the pope said, “God has guided and purified the Church, increasingly converting her in the service of the Gospel, human promotion, reconciliation and peace. A free Church for a free people!”

Seeing the joy and unity of the different generations and vocations of the Catholic faithful, the pope said he witnessed “the foundation of a hope that withstands the disappointments caused by ideologies and the empty promises of the powerful.”

“This hope demands concrete commitment, and the Church has the responsibility, with the witness and courageous proclamation of the Word of God, to recognize the rights of all and to promote their actual respect,” he added.


Whenever a pope visits a country, it is a chance for the people to have their voices heard and for Catholics to

“express the joy of being God’s people and the hope for a better future, of dignity for each and every one,” he said. “I am happy to have given them this opportunity, and at the same time I thank the Lord for what they have given me, an inestimable treasure for my heart and my ministry.”

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## Confirmation Schedule

*Bishop Mark E. Brennan, Celebrant*

- Friday, May 1: St. Francis de Sales, Beckley; 6:30 p.m.
- Saturday, May 2: SS Peter & Paul, Oak Hill, 5:30 p.m.
- Sunday, May 3: St. Catherine of Siena, Ronceverte, 11 a.m.
- Saturday, May 9: Immaculate Conception, Clarksburg, 4:30 p.m.
- Sunday, May 10: St. Joseph the Worker, Weirton, 7 p.m.
- Monday, May 11: St. Michael, Wheeling, 5:30 p.m.
- Wednesday, May 13: Immaculate Conception, Fairmont, 6 p.m.
- Saturday, May 16: St. Vincent de Paul, Wheeling, 5 p.m.
- Sunday, May 17: St. Jude, Glen Dale, 9 a.m.
- Friday, May 22: Epiphany of the Lord, Moorefield, 6 p.m.
- Saturday, May 23: St. Leo, Inwood, 5 p.m.
- Sunday, May 24: St. Bernadette, Hedgesville, 11 a.m.
- Sunday, May 24: St. Joseph, Martinsburg, 4 p.m.
- Saturday, June 6: Basilica of the Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Charleston, 5:30 p.m.
- Sunday, June 14: St. Matthew / Sacred Heart Mission, Point Pleasant, 11:15 a.m.
- Saturday, June 20: St. Sebastian, Kingwood, 6 p.m.

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# Visita papal a África puso de relieve las injusticias locales y la alegría de la fe cristiana, dice el Papa León

Por Carol Glatz, Catholic News Service

**CIUDAD DEL VATICANO (CNS)** —El Papa León XIV deseaba que su viaje a África pusiera de relieve las graves injusticias que persisten en la región y transmitiera un mensaje de paz a un mundo marcado por los conflictos y las violaciones del derecho internacional.

"Queridos hermanos y hermanas, la visita del Papa es, para las poblaciones africanas, una ocasión para hacer oír sus voces, para expresar la alegría de ser pueblo de Dios", dijo el Santo Padre.

Siguiendo la costumbre de sus predecesores, el Papa León aprovechó su primera audiencia general tras su viaje del 13 al 23 de abril a cuatro naciones africanas para explicar a la gente el propósito de su visita y lo que más le había impactado de su recorrido.

Dirigiéndose a miles de personas en la Plaza de San Pedro el 29 de abril, el Papa León dijo en inglés que su estancia allí "tenía como objetivo ofrecer al mundo un mensaje de paz en un momento marcado por los conflictos y las frecuentes violaciones del derecho internacional".

"Junto con el llamado a la paz, también denuncié las graves injusticias que existen en esos países tan ricos en recursos naturales, instando a la comunidad internacional a superar las actitudes neocoloniales y a comprom-

eterse en una colaboración auténtica", dijo.

En su viaje, el Papa visitó Argelia, Camerún, Angola y Guinea Ecuatorial.

"Desde el inicio de mi pontificado, había pensado en un viaje a África", dijo en su discurso principal en italiano. "Doy gracias al Señor, que me ha permitido realizarlo como Pastor para visitar y animar al pueblo de Dios".

En Argelia, un país predominantemente musulmán, el Papa dijo que quería "mostrar al mundo que es posible vivir juntos como hermanos y hermanas, incluso de religiones distintas, cuando nos reconocemos hijos del mismo Padre misericordioso".

El país del norte de África es también el lugar de nacimiento de su "padre espiritual", San Agustín, y al "comenzar desde las raíces de mi identidad espiritual", le ofrecía una forma de destacar su legado, dijo. "Él es maestro en la búsqueda de Dios y de la verdad. Su testimonio es hoy de gran importancia para los cristianos y para cualquier persona".

Los otros tres países eran predominantemente cristianos, dijo, y "por tanto, me he sumergido en un ambiente de fiesta de la fe".

También fue un poco similar a "lo que le sucedía a Jesús con las multitudes de Galilea: Él las veía sedientas y hambrientas de justicia, y les anunci-

aba: 'Bienaventurados los pobres en el espíritu, bienaventurados los mansos, bienaventurados los que trabajan por la paz'", dijo el Papa, "y, reconociendo su fe, (Jesús) dijo: 'Vosotros sois la sal de la tierra y la luz del mundo'".

En Camerún, dijo a la multitud en la Plaza de San Pedro, reforzó el llamado a trabajar juntos por la reconciliación y la paz.

Al igual que el resto del continente, Camerún es rico en recursos naturales y humanos, dijo, pero es necesario que haya: "una distribución equitativa de las riquezas"; más oportunidades para los jóvenes; el fin de la "corrupción endémica"; la promoción del desarrollo integral y sostenible; y el cese de "las varias formas de neocolonialismo una cooperación internacional con visión de futuro".

En Guinea Ecuatorial, dijo, el pueblo "ha atravesado los acontecimientos de su historia" y "ha renovado con gran entusiasmo su voluntad de caminar unido hacia un futuro de esperanza".

"No puedo olvidar lo sucedido en la cárcel de Bata", afirmó, añadiendo que "nunca había visto nada semejante".

"Los reclusos cantaron a pleno pulmón un canto de agradecimiento a Dios y al Papa, pidiéndole que rece 'por sus pecados y su libertad'", y luego "han rezado conmigo el Padre Nuestro, bajo una lluvia torrencial. ¡Un

signo auténtico del Reino de Dios!".

Al referirse a cómo Angola superó su turbulento período de guerra civil, el Papa dijo: "En el crisol de esta historia, Dios ha guiado y purificado la Iglesia convirtiéndola cada vez más al servicio del Evangelio, de la promoción humana, de la reconciliación y de la paz. ¡Iglesia libre para un pueblo libre!".

Al ver la alegría y la unidad de las diferentes generaciones y vocaciones de los fieles católicos, el Papa dijo que fue testigo del "fundamento de una esperanza que resiste a las desilusiones causadas por las ideologías y las promesas vanas de los poderosos".

"Esta esperanza exige un compromiso concreto, y la Iglesia tiene la responsabilidad, con el testimonio y el anuncio valiente de la Palabra de Dios, de reconocer los derechos de todos y de promover su respeto efectivo", añadió.

Cada vez que un Papa visita un país, es una oportunidad para que el pueblo haga oír su voz y para que los católicos expresen la alegría de ser el pueblo de Dios y la esperanza de un futuro mejor, de dignidad para todos y cada uno, dijo el Santo Padre.

"Me alegro de haberles dado esta oportunidad, y, al mismo tiempo, doy gracias al Señor por lo que ellos me han dado: una riqueza inestimable para mi corazón y mi ministerio", concluyó.

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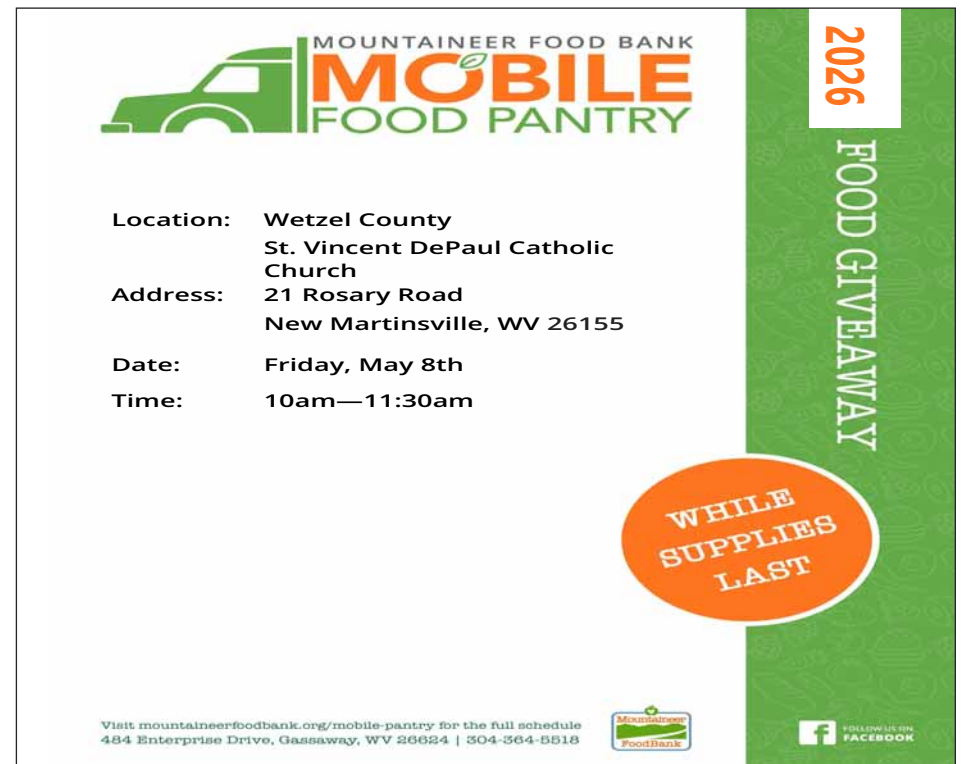


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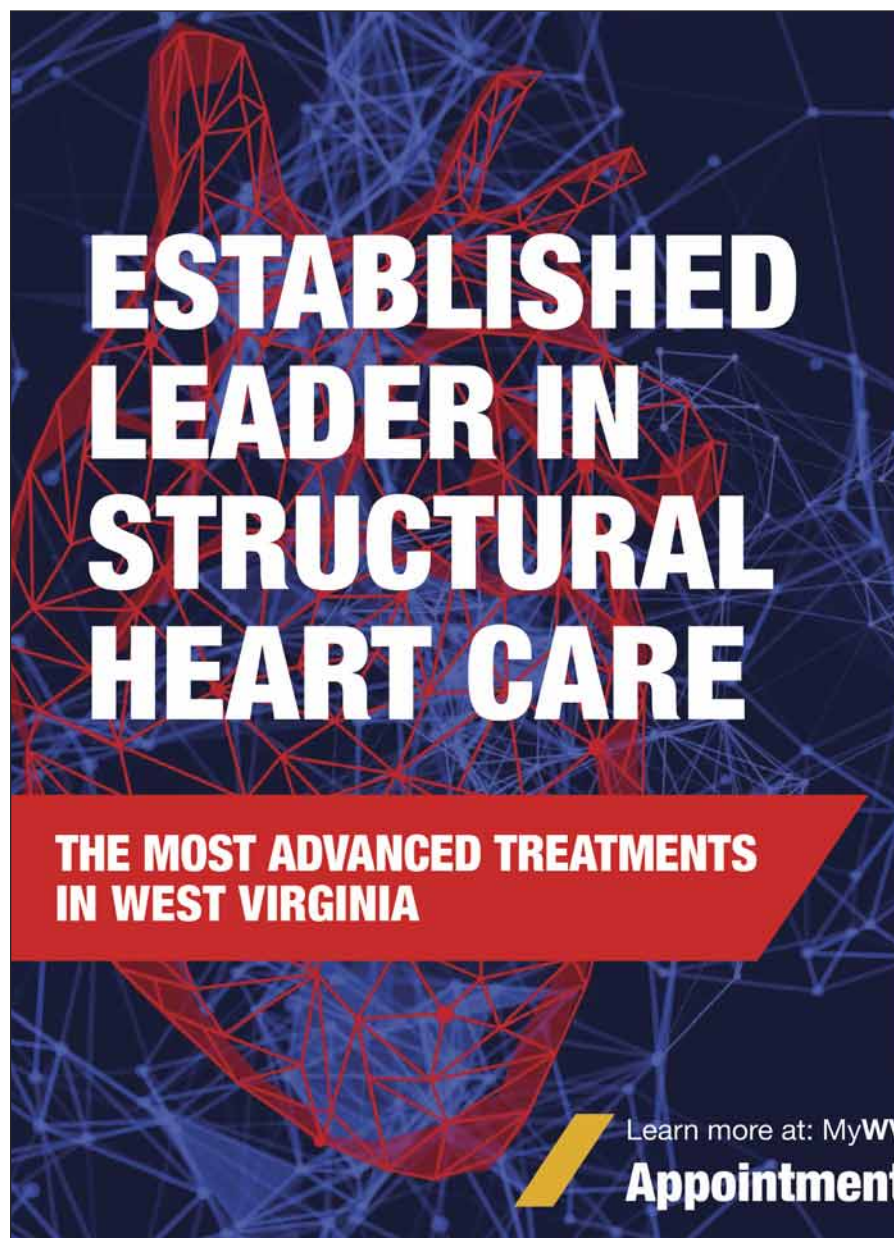
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