

THE CATHOLIC

# Spirit

## Synod Synthesis Shows Agreement, Divergences, Including on 'Synodality'

By **Cindy Wooden**

**VATICAN CITY (CNS)** — A report summarizing discussions at the assembly of the Synod of Bishops said the church may need more welcoming pastoral approaches, especially to people who feel excluded, but also acknowledged fears of betraying traditional church teachings and practices.

Among the topics addressed in the report were clerical sexual abuse,

women's roles in the church, outreach to poor and the concept of "synodality" itself.

The assembly, with 364 voting members — 365 counting Pope Francis — met in working sessions six days a week Oct. 4-28 after a three-day retreat outside of Rome. They were scheduled to join the pope Oct. 29 for the assembly's closing Mass. After the voting on the synthesis concluded, the pope said

he wanted to remind everyone that "the protagonist of the synod is the Holy Spirit." He briefly thanked the synod officers and joined members of the assembly in giving thanks to God. The assembly's discussions set the stage for a year-long period of reflection that will culminate in the second and final synod assembly in late 2024 on the same topic. The 41-page synthesis report, voted on

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## Diocese Has 12 New Aspirants to the Diaconate

By **Colleen Rowan**

**WEST VIRGINIA**—Twelve men from across the state have answered the call to the permanent diaconate for the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. They began their vocation journey Sept. 16 entering two years of aspirancy and then on to three years of formation. Their expected ordination as deacons will be in the summer of 2028.

The aspirants are Richard Byrd and Ramiro Martinez of St. James the Greater Parish in Charles Town; Michael Flanigan of Sacred Heart Parish in Bluefield; Mark Lendearo of Sacred Heart Parish in Williamson; Isaias Martinez and Joaquin Maya of St. Joseph Parish in Martinsburg; Daniel Moloney of St. Stephen Parish in Ona; Joe Pangilinan of Corpus Christi Parish in Wheeling; John Prutsok, IV of St. John the Evangelist Parish in Summersville; Rob Rogers of St. Matthew Parish in Ravenswood; John Shawler of Blessed Sacrament Parish in South Charleston; and Matthew Vester of St. John University

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## Beckley Vicariate's 40 Hours Devotion to be at 14 Churches in November

By **Colleen Rowan**

A vicariate-wide 40 Hours Devotion begins today, Nov. 3, in the Beckley Vicariate. Over the next few weeks, 14 parishes throughout the vicariate will open the doors of their churches inviting the faithful to come in and spend time with Christ.

The 40 Hours Devotion begins this evening at Sacred Heart Church in Bluefield with Mass of Exposition at 4 p.m. followed by Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament from 5 to 7 p.m. Very Rev. Sebastian Devasya, pastor of Sacred Heart Parishes in Bluefield and Princeton, said that having this devotion during the Parish Year of the National Eucharistic Revival unites all in the Eucharist.

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### *Bishop Celebrates Solemnity with Huntington's Little Saints*



Courtesy Photo

Bishop Mark Brennan is pictured with students from Our Lady of Fatima Parish School in Huntington who portrayed saints during the school Mass he celebrated at the parish church on the Solemnity of All Saints Nov. 1. The students are, from left, Lucianne Kluemper as St. Lucy, Gabrielle Yemba as St. Veronica Giulliani, Katherine Sowards as St. Catherine of Alexandria, Benjamin Norris as St. Benjamin, and Kennadi Smith as St. Elizabeth of Hungary. With them also is their pastor, Father Tijo George, MCBS, standing with the bishop.

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## Synod...

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paragraph-by-paragraph Oct. 28, described its purpose as presenting “convergences, matters for consideration and proposals that emerged from the dialogue” on issues discussed under the headings of synodality, communion, mission and participation. Every item in the report was approved by at least two-thirds of the members present and voting, synod officials said. They published a complete list of the votes.

Within the synod topics, members looked at the role of women in the church, including in decision making, and at the possibility of ordaining women deacons. The report asked for more “theological and pastoral research on the access of women to the diaconate,” including a review of the conclusions of commissions Pope Francis set up in 2016 and 2020.

The paragraph was approved 279-67, which was more than the needed two-thirds support but still garnered among the highest negative votes.

Among members of the assembly, the report said, some thought the idea of women deacons would be a break with tradition, while others insisted it would “restore the practice of the Early Church,” including at the time of the New Testament, which mentions women deacons.

“Others still, discern it as an appropriate and necessary response to the signs of the times, faithful to the Tradition, and one that would find an echo in the hearts of many who seek new energy and vitality in the Church,” it said. But, the report added, some members thought that would “marry the Church to the spirit of the age.”

Assembly members also discussed

pastoral approaches to welcoming and including in the life of parishes people who have felt excluded, including the poor, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ Catholics and Catholics whose marriages are not recognized by the church.

The synthesis report did not use the term “LGBTQ+” or even “homosexuality” and spoke only generally of issues related to “matters of identity and sexuality.”

Jesuit Father James Martin, a synod member involved in outreach to LGBTQ+ Catholics, told Catholic News Service, “From what I understand, there was too much pushback to make using the term ‘LGBTQ’ viable, even though it was contained in the ‘Instrumentum Laboris,’” or synod working document.

“This opposition came up often in the plenary sessions, along with others who argued from the other side, that is, for greater inclusion and for seeing LGBTQ people as people and not an ideology,” he said.

The synthesis said that “to develop authentic ecclesial discernment in these and other areas, it is necessary to approach these questions in the light of the Word of God and Church teaching, properly informed and reflected upon.”

“In order to avoid repeating vacuous formulas, we need to provide an opportunity for a dialogue involving the human and social sciences, as well as philosophical and theological reflection,” it added.

The divergences in the assembly, it said, reflected opposing concerns: that “if we use doctrine harshly and with a judgmental attitude, we betray the Gospel; if we practice mercy ‘on the cheap,’ we do not convey God’s love.”

Still, it said, “in different ways, people who feel marginalized or excluded from the Church because of

their marriage status, identity or sexuality, also ask to be heard and accompanied. There was a deep sense of love, mercy and compassion felt in the Assembly for those who are or feel hurt or neglected by the Church, who want a place to call ‘home’ where they can feel safe, be heard and respected, without fear of feeling judged.”

The report emphasized the “listening” that took place on the local, national and continental levels before the assembly and the “conversations in the Spirit” that took place during it, which involved each person speaking in his or her small group, other participants at first commenting only on what struck them, silent reflection and then discussion. In several places throughout the report, assembly members insisted that greater efforts must be made to listen to the survivors of clerical sexual abuse and those who have endured spiritual or psychological abuse.

“Openness to listening and accompanying all, including those who have suffered abuse and hurt in the Church, has made visible many who have long felt invisible,” it said. “The long journey toward reconciliation and justice, including addressing the structural conditions that abetted such abuse, remains before us, and requires concrete gestures of penitence.”

Members of the assembly said the process helped them experience the church as “God’s home and family, a Church that is closer to the lives of her people, less bureaucratic and more relational.” However, it said, the terms “synodal” and “synodality,” which “have been associated with this experience and desire,” need further clarification, including theological clarification and, perhaps, in canon law.

Some participants, it said, questioned how an assembly where about 21% of participants were lay women, lay men, religious and priests could be termed a Synod of Bishops. The report also acknowledged fears, including that “the teaching of the Church will be

changed, causing us to depart from the Apostolic faith of our forebears and, in doing so, betraying the expectations of those who hunger and thirst for God today.” In response, though, assembly members said, “We are confident that synodality is an expression of the dynamic and living Tradition.”

“It is clear that some people are afraid that they will be forced to change; others fear that nothing at all will change or that there will be too little courage to move at the pace of the living Tradition,” the report said. “Also,” it added, “perplexity and opposition can sometimes conceal a fear of losing power and the privileges that derive from it.” Members of the assembly described the synodal process as being “rooted in the Tradition of the Church” and taking place in light of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, particularly its emphasis on “the Church as Mystery and People of God, called to holiness.”

Synodality, they said, “values the contribution all the baptized make, according to their respective vocations,” and thus “constitutes a true act of further reception of the Council.”

The report also insisted the purpose of synodality is mission. “As disciples of Jesus, we cannot shirk the responsibility of demonstrating and transmitting the love and tenderness of God to a wounded humanity,” the report said.

Throughout the synod process, the report said, “many women expressed deep gratitude for the work of priests and bishops. They also spoke of a Church that wounds. Clericalism, a chauvinist mentality and inappropriate expressions of authority continue to scar the face of the Church and damage its communion.”

“A profound spiritual conversion is needed as the foundation for any effective structural change,” it said. “Sexual abuse and the abuse of power and authority continue to cry out for justice, healing and reconciliation.”

**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 Very Rev. Dennis Schuelkens, Jr., V.E., ext. 270; or Sr. Martha Gomez, ext. 264. You may also call the Diocese’s Office of Safe Environment at 304.230.1504. You may also call the Diocese’s sexual abuse hotline at 833.230.5656. Additional methods of reporting are available at [www.dwc.org](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:** please call Erin McFarland, M.Ed., LPC, at 304.559.6742. In addition to the methods listed above for reporting sexual abuse, the Diocese also has partnered with Navex Global to offer the EthicsPoint platform to report other, additional concerns, such as suspected financial, professional, and personal misconduct of a priest, deacon, religious, or lay employee of the Diocese or any Catholic parish or school in West Virginia. The EthicsPoint platform can be accessed via [www.dwc.org](http://www.dwc.org), under “Accountability,” then “Report Misconduct” or by calling 844.723.8381. EthicsPoint is a third-party reporting system that reports to civil authorities where applicable and Diocesan authorities, and the identity of the person reporting is protected. Links and information: WV Department of Health and Human Resources: <https://www.wvdhhr.org/report.asp>. West Virginia State Police, Crimes Against Children Unit: 304-293-6400.

## Sexual Abuse Awareness Training

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



Office: 1322 Eoff St.  
Mailing: PO Box 230  
Wheeling, WV 26003  
(304) 232-0444  
Fax: (304) 233-8551  
Web site:

[www.thecatholicspiritwv.org](http://www.thecatholicspiritwv.org)  
Diocesan Web site: [www.dwc.org](http://www.dwc.org)  
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**Executive Editor:** Colleen Rowan, Ext. 347 ..... [crowan@dwc.org](mailto:crowan@dwc.org)  
**Advertising:** contact Colleen Rowan  
**Freelance Writers:** Martina Hart, John Sherwood,  
**Member:** Catholic Press Association, West Virginia Press Association, National Press Photographers Association, Inc.



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## Aspirants...

**Cont'd from Page 1**  
Parish in Morgantown.

Deacon John Yaquinta, coordinator of the diocese's Permanent Diaconate Formation Program, said he is excited to start a new class of aspirants while finishing the current class of 20 candidates approaching ordination June 7, 2024.

"People sometimes ask me, 'Why do we need more deacons?' Because Mother Church has plenty of work for us to do," he said. "I would love to see at least one deacon in every parish in the diocese to help the pastors and parish staff with the great work they are doing now."

The aspirants' first year includes seven sessions on Saturdays at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in Stonewood, where Deacon Yaquinta serves as the permanent deacon. Sessions eight and nine, he said, will be full weekends at St. John XXIII Pastoral Center in Charleston.

The next four years, they will attend classes at St. John XXIII. The remainder of the program will be taught by instructors associated with St. Meinrad's School of Theology in Indiana. Several priests and lay people in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston are on the staff of St. Meinrad's to help teach these college level courses.

Many different people and aspects have drawn the aspirants to the diaconate in West Virginia.

For Bluefield's Michael Flanigan, it was his connection with the late Deacon Don Hammond.

"Deacon Don really exemplified the notion that we can do wonders with very little or nothing," said Flanigan, who is a magistrate, previously worked on an ambulance, and has a lifetime of public service. "Getting to meet other deacons in the state has shown me that deacons really do have one foot in two worlds. While Deacon Don was still living, I had inquired on how to become a deacon."

It was also the example of deacons that drew Ona's Daniel Moloney to the vocation, namely Deacon Terry Philpot of Toledo, Deacon James Kowalski of Cincinnati (who is also his great uncle), Deacon Timothy Birie of Columbus and



Courtesy Photo

**Pictured are the 12 new aspirants to the diaconate for the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. In the front row, from left, are Ramiro Martinez, John Prutsok, Joe Pangilinan, Isaias Martinez, Mark Lendearo, and Joaquin Maya. In the back, from left, are Daniel Moloney, John Shawler, Richard Byrd, Michael Flanigan, Matthew Vester, and Rob Rogers.**

former coach, and Deacon Columbus Carter of Savannah, Ga.

"These men were leaders and preachers and great examples of what I hope to contribute," he said.

The opportunity to serve the Lord by serving others is what drew Rob Rogers of Ravenswood to the diaconate. "I believe the Holy Spirit is guiding my journey and I am confident that the process will only strengthen my faith and love for others," he said, "despite any obstacles that may lay ahead."

Joaquin Maya of Martinsburg said, "I want to respond to God's calling and may everything be as God wants it to be."

In October 2021, Richard Byrd and his wife Maria moved to Charles Town. About eight months later, he was in the chapel for adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament at St. James the Greater Parish in Charles Town praying for his two sons' vocations and wellbeing.

"I ended my prayer for them by asking God to use them for the priesthood if it is His Will," he recalled. "As this prayer was being said, immediately I heard the words 'Be My Deacon' not verbally, but deep within my heart. It was a certainty,

and I was overwhelmed with joy. I never thought about being a deacon or even knew that I could be one or even considered myself worthy enough of such an honor. I knew that I had been called by God to start the next chapter of my life, a life of service."

Maria is principal at St. Joseph School in Martinsburg. "We are truly blessed," Richard said.

John Shawler said he was drawn to the diaconate through the spiritual direction of several priests at his Parish of Blessed Sacrament in South Charleston.

"I am hoping to serve the church by offering support to priests in my diocese and through teaching," he said. "I am looking forward to the academic coursework of the formation process the most, as well as meeting the other men in formation."

After making his Catholic faith a top priority, attending Mass and praying more often, John Prutsok found himself in a place in his life where he wanted to be.

"The more I attended Mass the more I started to realize just how important the role of the priest is and how close to God he is," Prutsok said. "I started feeling that I wanted to be close to God so, I began helping out in Mass by serving as an altar server and being a sacristan which, felt great, but there was still something driving me to do more."

Prutsok then spoke to his pastor, Father Rene Gerona, SVD, of St. John the Evangelist Parish in Summersville, about becoming a deacon. After time and discussions, Father Gerona said, "Well, let's get you to where you need to be."

"Today," Prutsok said. "I

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## Devotion...

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"We, as a vicariate, come together in worship and adoration," Father Devasya said. "It also is a way to revive old traditions making them new and fresh for our people. Many people have not experienced Eucharistic Adoration. This 40-hour devotion is a beautiful way to open their hearts to Jesus!"

Each of the participating parishes will offer adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament at different times, and for different durations — some will have adoration for five hours, some for one hour. By the time of the final day, the 14 parishes will have had adoration available for well over 40 hours. Masses will also be celebrated at a number of the churches before or after adoration.

The idea to have the vicariate-wide 40 Hours Devotion, was that of Father Leonard Smith, pastor of St. Francis de Sales Parish in Beckley. He presented the idea at the Beckley Vicariate Meeting, saying: "In years past, the 40 Hours Devotion has been a popular form of devotion to the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and has taken several different forms. As a way of observing this Parish Year of the Eucharistic Revival, I thought a series of periods of Eucharistic Adoration in the parishes and missions of the Beckley Vicariate would be an effective witness to our faith in the Eucharist, especially in our skeptical age. Our acts of Eucharistic devotion are a witness not only to those of other Christian churches, but also to many of our Catholic brothers and sisters whose faith in the Eucharist needs to be fostered and sustained."

Father Smith said the number 40 is significant as it brings to mind the 40 years of the Exodus, during which the Israelites were fed by Manna from heaven, Elijah's 40-day journey to the Mountain of God, for which he was strengthened by an angel who brought him bread and water, and Jesus' 40 days of prayer and fasting in the desert, "reminding us that we do not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God."

"Similarly," he said, "we are nourished and sustained by our Heavenly Manna, the Eucharist, that we may persevere in our own journey to fullness of the Kingdom of God."

As vicar forane, Father Devasya said that he is very humbled by the support of the 40 Hours Devotion by all the priests in the Beckley Vicariate.

"I am truly blessed to work with my brothers in Christ!" Father Devasya said. "Each of them has unique gifts and they inspire our people and each other when we come together in service sharing

our ideas and encouraging one another. I am so pleased by the participation of all our faith communities throughout our vicariate in this 40-hour Eucharistic devotion."

Father Devasya encouraged the Catholic faithful to take advantage of this opportunity to spend time with Christ. In sharing the tremendous opportunity that adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament offers, Father Devasya shared the story of St. John Vianney, the saintly pastor of Ars in France, that he often saw

a farmer sit in the back of the parish church. The saint took notice that the farmer would spend long periods of time there before the Eucharist. Finally, one day, the saint asked him what he did during his time of adoration. The farmer simply responded, "I look at Him and He looks at me."

"This is what Eucharistic Adoration is, Father Devasya said, "a time for us to concentrate exclusively on Jesus, present before us, and allow Him to look back upon us with love."

Spending time with Jesus in Eucharistic Adoration looks differently for each person, Father Devasya said. Some may prayerfully meditate on the Bible or another spiritual book, pray the rosary or another devotion, pray using a prayer book or a set of prayers as part of a Holy Hour, journal in a prayer journal, or simply spend quiet time with the Lord.

Below is more information and the full schedule of the Beckley Vicariate's 40 Hours Devotion.



## Beckley Vicariate-40 Hours Devotion

*The 40 Hours Devotion dates to 1527 when it was introduced by St. Anthony Mary Zaccaria in the Italian cities of Milan and Vicenza and was later spread by St. Ignatius of Loyola and the Society of Jesus. Originally conceived as 40 hours of continuous prayer before our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, either in one parish or in several parishes in successive periods of Eucharistic Adoration, the devotion has taken different forms over the years.*

*As part of our observance of the **Parish Year of the Eucharistic Revival**, the parishes of the Beckley Vicariate will be hosting 40 Hours Devotion during the month of November, beginning with an opening Mass of Exposition on Friday, November 3 at 4:00 p.m. at Sacred Heart Parish in Bluefield, and concluding with a Mass of Reposition on Monday, November 20 at 6:00 p.m. at St. Francis de Sales Parish in Beckley. **Please join us as you are able as together we witness to our faith in Our Lord's presence in the Eucharist!***

### Schedule of Devotions

Fri., Nov. 3	Sacred Heart Parish, Bluefield	<b>4:00 Mass of Exposition;</b> 5:00-7:00 p.m. Adoration
Tue., Nov. 7	St. John Parish, Summersville	3:00-8:00 p.m. Adoration
Wed., Nov. 8	St. Peter Parish, Welch	11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Adoration
Thu., Nov. 9	St. John Neumann Parish, Marlinton	6:00-7:00 p.m. Adoration
Fri., Nov. 10	Sacred Heart Parish, Princeton	4:00 p.m. Mass; 5:00-7:00 Adoration
Sat., Nov. 11	Holy Family Parish, Richwood	1:00-4:00 p.m. Adoration
Sun., Nov. 12	Sacred Heart Mission, Powhatan	11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Adoration
Tue., Nov. 14	St. Mark Mission, Bartow	6:00-7:00 p.m. Adoration
Wed., Nov. 15	St. Patrick Parish, Hinton	3:00 p.m. Mass; 4:00-7:00 Adoration
Thu., Nov. 16	SS. Peter & Paul Parish, Oak Hill	1:00-6:00 p.m. Adoration; 6:00 Mass
Fri., Nov. 17	St. Peter Parish, Welch	9:00-11:00 a.m. Adoration
Sat., Nov. 18	St. Charles Borromeo Parish, White Sulphur Springs	1:00-4:00 p.m. Adoration; 4:00 Mass
Sun., Nov. 19	St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Roncerverte	11:00 a.m. Mass; 12:00-3:00 p.m. Adoration
Mon., Nov. 20	St. Francis de Sales Parish, Beckley	9:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m. Adoration; <b>6:00 p.m. Mass of Reposition</b>

# Bishop Brennan Reflects on Pilgrimage to Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Girls Town in Mexico

By Bishop Mark Brennan

The few days, September 29-October 2, that fifty other pilgrims and I spent in Mexico were a blessing. Tom and Glory Sullivan, friends from my first priestly assignment, sponsored the pilgrimage and accompanied us all the way.

On Saturday, we first visited the Cathedral of the Assumption of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary in the Zócalo, the grand plaza in the heart of the old city, with the National Palace and Federal City building across from it. In the Baroque style, it has numerous side chapels and relics of saints, including Mexican martyrs. We had some quiet time for prayer and then visited the crypt where the former Archbishops are buried, including Juan Zumárraga, to whom in 1531 St. Juan Diego made known the Virgin's request for a church on Tepeyac hill and on whose cloak or tilma there suddenly appeared an image of the Virgin as the roses tumbled out.

After lunch we went to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. There were many families and young people visiting the site of Mary's apparitions. Some of us climbed Tepeyac, the hill where Bishop Zumárraga authorized the construction of the first chapel, some of which still stands. At its side is a small convent of eight Discalced



Photos by Edi Fuller  
Pictured above are most of the 3,000 girls, age 13 to 18, at Girls Town, la Villa de las Niñas, in Chalco, Mexico. At right, Bishop Mark Brennan cuts the ribbon for two new Girls Town buildings, which he also blessed. One building will receive alumnae and the other building has science labs, a music room, a computer center and a library.



Carmelite Sisters, who pray daily for the Church, the world and anyone who asks. I asked the Sister who spoke with us if we could do anything for them. "Please pray for us," she said. So we prayed a Hail Mary for them before we left. Then we walked down to the modern Basilica and celebrated Mass in the Chapel of St. Joseph. Fr. Bill Ryan was in our group. We had

concelebrated a Mass in the Basilica in January, 1986, as we were making our way to Colombia for further Hispanic studies. It was even better this time to have other pilgrims with us.

On Sunday, we rode our bus an hour outside Mexico City to a town named Chalco. There we spent the

day at Girls Town, la Villa de las Niñas. Three thousand girls from about 13 to 18 years old live and study there for five years. Most come from very poor families in distress, usually with only one parent, often with none. The Sisters of Mary, founded by the Venerable Father Aloysius Schwartz, a priest born

and raised in Washington, DC, give loving care to the girls and help them become responsible, faith-filled young women. They learn to pray, receive their sacraments and take part enthusiastically in the Mass. Their education is not only academic but

**See "Pilgrimage" on Page 6**

## Pilgrimage to Mexico was 'Life Changing' for West Virginia Catholics

By Colleen Rowan

Seeing the 3,000 young girls who live at Girls Town in Chalco, Mexico, is a sight Edi Fuller of Wheeling will not soon forget. "It was very emotional," she said, "because there were so many girls there" — girls, ages 13 to 18 years old, who have found safety from poverty, distress, or abuse with the Sisters of Mary.

Fuller, a parishioner of St. Michael Parish in Wheeling, was among 50 pilgrims who joined Bishop Mark Brennan on a pilgrimage to Girls Town and to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe for four days in late September to early October.

**"I ended up with 800 petitions to give to Our Lady."**

**—Edi Fuller, a parishioner of St. Michael Parish in Wheeling**

The Sisters of Mary were founded in 1964 by Venerable Father Aloysius Schwartz of Washington, D.C. The order operates Girls Town in many countries and opened the program

in Chalco in 1991.

On their recent visit, the pilgrims with Bishop Brennan had the chance to see firsthand how the sisters are making an impact and changing the girls' lives for the better in this area of Mexico.

"I enjoyed the trip very much and was most impressed with the children's village," Dave Duritza of Sacred Heart Parish in Bluefield said of Girls Town. He was also one of the many who joined in the pilgrimage.

In addition to their academic studies, the Girls Town residents also learn to sew, how to grow food, and other life skills to help prepare them for the future.

Fuller recalled seeing all the girls in the gym wearing uniforms that they made themselves.

"They're happy. They're smiling all the time," she said of the girls. "They have a lot of talent. Bishop Brennan was doing math with them in Spanish."

The pilgrims also attended the Mass Bishop Brennan celebrated for the girls.

"They did everything perfectly," Fuller said. "They were very dedicated at the Mass. They sang beautifully and they played wonderfully. It was just so beautiful."

On their visit, Bishop Brennan helped dedicate two new buildings

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## Pilgrimage...

Cont'd from Page 5

vocational: they are taught to sew – they make their own clothes – and grow vegetables and fruit and learn the basics of electricity, plumbing, auto mechanics and computer skills. The graduates almost always find work and help their families rise out of poverty. Many become teachers, nurses, doctors, accountants and some join the Sisters of Mary to continue the mission.

We celebrated a joyful Mass with the girls and the Sisters, all of whom sang beautifully with some playing guitars, bass, drums and maracas. I dredged up my Spanish but gave a summary of my homily in English for the pilgrims. The girls put on a show for us after Mass, dancing in bright costumes which they had made and singing songs in both Spanish and English – including “Country Roads!”

We had lunch with the Sisters and then I blessed two new buildings, one to receive alumnae of Girls Town – the Sisters maintain contact with them and they are welcome to visit – and the other containing science labs, a music room, computer center and library. Many of the girls were playing

sports: soccer, running track, swimming in a large indoor pool. Before leaving in the late afternoon we had ice cream in hollowed-out coconuts. The girls loved it and so did I. It was encouraging to see how happy the girls were. They have a rigorous schedule during the week. Sunday is their only day to sleep a little longer, rising at 7:00 AM instead of at 6:00. They enjoyed their free time. They get to go home at Christmas for two weeks but otherwise “home” is with the other girls and the Sisters.

All of us pilgrims found our visit to the Villa de las Niñas inspiring. In a world in which there is so much exploitation of children, we saw what loving people – the Sisters and their benefactors – could do to promote children’s welfare, both spiritual and material.

It takes a lot of money to operate Girls Town. The European sources have been drying up, so other sources will have to be tapped. It would make sense for American Catholics to support such a great work inaugurated by a holy American priest who may one day be canonized. If you want to know more about the work of the Sisters of Mary, go to [www.worldvillages.org](http://www.worldvillages.org).

## Mexico...

Cont'd from Page 5

at Girls Town—one for alumnae and the other containing science labs, a music room, computer center, and library. Bishop Brennan cut the ribbon at the ceremony and blessed the buildings.

The pilgrimage also included a visit to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City. “I always wanted to see Our Lady, there,” Fuller shared. Before leaving for the pilgrimage, she asked people if they had any petitions they wanted her to present to Our Lady. She shared with them that Our Lady answers the petitions presented to her there at the shrine.

“I ended up with 800 petitions to give to Our Lady,” Fuller said.

Laughing, she recalled being on the “people mover” (a small scale automated transit) on the way to the shrine and trying to stuff petitions and other items people gave to her to give to Our Lady into little petition boxes. A kind man helped her to find a larger box right below the enormous shrine where she was able to place all 800 petitions and the other items.

The pilgrimage also included a visit to the Cathedral of the Assumption of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary in the Zócalo. Bishop Brennan said the cathedral has numerous side chapels and relics of saints, including Mexican martyrs. The pilgrims had quiet time for prayer, he said, and then they vis-

ited the crypt where the former archbishops are buried, including Juan Zumárraga, to whom in 1531 St. Juan Diego made known the Virgin’s request for a church on Tepeyac hill and on whose cloak or tilma there suddenly appeared an image of the Virgin as the roses tumbled out.

Fuller described the four-day pilgrimage as “absolutely life changing.”

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# St. Ann Parish in Shinnston Celebrates 100th Anniversary

By Colleen Rowan

St. Ann Parish in Shinnston is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. The parish community gathered for a Jubilee Mass celebrated by Bishop Mark Brennan Oct. 29.

“What a joy for me to be with you on this anniversary of the founding of this parish 100 years ago,” Bishop Brennan said at the beginning of the celebration. “Something good was started here in 1923 and it must continue. The Lord’s work must continue here.”

The bishop thanked the pastor, Father Akila Rodrigo, TOR, as well as Father Deepu Joseph, MCBS, who serves as parochial vicar, and area priests for concelebrating the Mass. He also thanked Deacon David Lester, who grew up as a member of St. Ann’s and now serves as pastoral associate at St. Peter the Fisherman Parish in Fairmont, for serving as the deacon for the Mass.

Before the celebration began, Parish Council President Jimmy Gemondo gave a brief history of the parish, sharing that Catholics of Shinnston attended Mass once a week in a funeral parlor celebrated by a priest from Clarksburg more than 100 years ago. Early in 1923, Archbishop John Swint established St. Ann’s. The present church was built in 1952 and was later renovated in 1968 according to Vatican II guidelines.

“In October of 1999,



Courtesy Photo

## St. Ann Parish, Shinnston

under the guidance and vision of Father Karl Wohinc, our Perpetual Adoration Chapel was opened—the first in our diocese,” Gemondo said. Named Blessed Margaret of Castello Eucharistic Adoration Chapel, it continues today and is located next to the church. The chapel thrived with prayer and adoration 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for many years. During the pandemic, the chapel was closed, and opened back up this year for adoration three days a week on Sundays, Wednes-

days, and Fridays from 6 a.m. to midnight. The chapel is open to all denominations, and people from all over come to visit the chapel to adore and to pray. Father Wohinc served as pastor of St. Ann’s for 28 years.

“Our family at St. Ann’s is continuing to grow,” Gemondo said. “And it is an active, vibrant parish. I would like to thank all of our priests, past and present, who have served us throughout the years; all of the societies; all of the ministers; and of course

you, the parishioners; and Bishop Mark Brennan for being with us today as we celebrate 100 years as a parish.”

Anniversaries remind us of our origins, Bishop Brennan said in his homily. They encourage us to “recommit ourselves to creating a future that is faithful also to the past. In this 100th anniversary of St. Ann’s Parish, remember Archbishop Swint, early in his time as a bishop here, who decided this town needed a Catholic church.”

Many Irish priests

served the parish in the early years, Bishop Brennan said, noting that the parish is blessed with international priests today as well. He recognized the many lay people and founding members of the parish throughout its history.

“We remember those who established a Catholic parish here, in Shinnston, and those who have proclaimed the gospel by their words and by their deeds, who led children and adults to faith in Christ.

**See “Anniversary” on Page 8**



Screen shot photo from livestream  
Bishop Mark Brennan, left, and Father Akila Rodrigo, TOR, offer Communion at the 100th Anniversary Jubilee Mass at St. Ann Parish in Shinnston Oct. 29.



Screen shot photo from livestream  
Children of St. Ann Parish in Shinnston sing “Jesus Loves Me” at the end of the 100th Anniversary Jubilee Mass Oct. 29.



Courtesy Photo

The back of St. Ann Parish in Shinnston is shown amid the fall foliage.

## Anniversary...

Cont'd from Page 7

We remember the many baptisms and first Communions, confirmations, weddings, funerals, other events that took place here to nourish people's faith..." Bishop Brennan said. "It is good to remember and to celebrate. It all starts with God."

The bishop encouraged everyone in the congregation that day to share their Catholic faith with others.

"Do you want St. Ann's to have a 200th anniversary?" the bishop asked those gathered. "We won't be there for it, but we can prepare the way for it by

what we do now. Have courage. Share your faith with others that this parish may flourish in God's sight and in Shinnston for years to come. Amen."

At the end of the Mass, children of the parish came to the front of the church and sang "Jesus Loves Me."

Father Rodrigo thanked everyone for their presence and the bishop for celebrating the Mass, as well as all of the priests, those who participated in the Mass, and those who planned the celebration, especially the Altar and Rosary Society and Holy Name Society. He thanked the Heavenly Father for the grace he has bestowed on St. Ann's. A dinner followed the celebration.

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# Bishop Blesses New Entrance and Renovations at Wheeling's St. Vincent de Paul Parish School



Colleen Rowan Photo

Bishop Mark Brennan blesses the new gymnasium entrance at St. Vincent de Paul Parish School in Wheeling Oct. 27.

**By Colleen Rowan**

**WHEELING** — Gathering with a joyful St. Vincent de Paul Parish School community in Wheeling, Bishop Mark Brennan blessed the school's new gymnasium entrance, renovated hallways, and new bathrooms Oct. 27. Students, teachers, school administration and staff, families, and members of the community gathered in the school parking lot for a prayer service which followed the Mass Bishop Brennan celebrated at St. Vincent de Paul Parish.

"Lord God almighty, in your kindness hear our prayer," the bishop prayed. "We dedicate this renovated space in St. Vincent School to the education of our youth, to the progress of the sciences, and to

learning. May it become a center where students and teachers are viewed with the words of truth in search of the wisdom that guides the Christian life and strive wholeheartedly to stand by Christ as their teacher who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen."

The bishop then blessed the new entrance, hallways, and bathrooms with holy water.

Joining the bishop for the prayer service were Father Jeason Stephan, MCBS, pastor of the school and parish, and Principal Jarrett Kuhns.

"I'd like to thank everybody for joining us today and for all of your support," said Kuhns. "We have amazing families, amazing parishioners, and wonderful students and staff.

We're so grateful to be able to continue to update and upgrade our space, our curriculum, and all that we have here at St. Vincent's, so we continue to offer exceptional education and fulfill our mission."

He also thanked Bishop Brennan "for being here today to mark this momentous occasion," as well as Father Stephan and all of the donors and benefactors.

"We truly appreciate all of you and we thank you so much," he said.

Kuhns also thanked Panhandle Cleaning and Restoration, Savage Construction, and Yahn Electric who handled the construction and renovation.

The project started two years ago with funds raised through One Mission One

Day. The new entrance features a covered porch for students and an ADA accessible ramp. Hallways have been updated with new LED lighting, new ceiling tile, new carpet, and brand new ADA accessible bathrooms.

In speaking to The Catholic Spirit before the prayer service, Kuhns shared that St. Vincent's has updated its math curriculum and started an in-house math tutoring program during the school day. There is also an English language arts curriculum review on the horizon. The school is also planning a classroom renovation and sponsorship project which will start as soon as possible. Kuhns said a demo room will be set up to show **See "School" on Page 10**

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## School...

Cont'd from Page 9

to potential donors by the end of Christmas break. The goal, Kuhns said, is to renovate all of the classrooms with new flooring, new paint, and new furniture.

"Basically, a complete classroom overhaul," Kuhns said. "And what's exciting is we've actually already handled and finished the technology piece to the classroom renovation. Our technology has been upgraded in the building. We have put CAT6 wiring throughout the whole campus. We also have an access point in every classroom and we have ViewSonic smartboards and ultra high definition TVs in every room as well."

The school will release more information about sponsoring a classroom soon.

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# Clarksburg Parish to Celebrate 100th Anniversary with Marian Shrines Pilgrimage to Europe

By Colleen Rowan

As part of its 100th anniversary celebration (which will be in July 2024), St. James the Apostle Parish in Clarksburg is sponsoring a Marian Shrines Pilgrimage to Europe led by its pastor, Father Akila Rodrigo, TOR. The pilgrimage will be held Oct. 7-18, 2024, and promises to be a spiritually enriching and educational trip.

"We'll visit Santiago de Compostela, Spain, where St. James is buried; the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima in Portugal; and the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes in France," said Father Rodrigo in a letter to parishioners. He is also pastor of Sacred Heart Mission in Salem and St. Ann Parish in Shinnston.

"Our pilgrimage is focused both on important holy sites for Catho-

lics and on experiencing the art, architecture, and natural beauty of Spain, Portugal, and France," he added.

Father Rodrigo wrote of other highlights that will include walking part of a Camino that St. James walked to spread the Good News. The pilgrimage, he said, will also take the group to visit the Sagrada Familia (Holy Family) Cathedral and Güell Park in Barcelona, designed by Antonio Gaudí.

"As soon as you enter, you feel the Holy Spirit and see how God worked through the genius of this architect," Jenny Santilli, a parishioner of St. James who is helping to plan the pilgrimage, said of the cathedral. "This trip is as much cultural as spiritual as we'll enjoy the art, music, architecture, history and food of Portugal, Spain and

France."

"Our pilgrimage ... is a trip of a lifetime," she continued, adding that there will be a visit to Zaragoza, Spain, "where Mary first appeared in Europe."

Father Rodrigo said he chose Unitours, Inc. to organize the pilgrimage as it is one of the largest tour operators in the world and has conducted pilgrimages since 1957. The cost is \$4,999 per person (double occupancy) which includes flights (departs from Pittsburgh), modern motor coach transportation, hotels, breakfast, dinner, a full-time tour operator, and English-speaking tour guides. Other costs include beverages, optional travel insurance for \$245, and money for incidentals and souvenirs.

For information, questions, and reservations, contact: Father Rod-

rigo by calling (304) 622-1668 or by e-mail to stjamesparish.clarksburg@gmail.com; or Santilli by calling (304) 476-5623 or by e-mail to jennysantilli@gmail.com. See ad on Page 10 for additional information as well.

Anyone who would like to join the pilgrimage and help celebrate the parish's 100th anniversary is welcome to attend. "I am looking forward to experiencing this trip of a lifetime with you!" Father Rodrigo said.

The parish's 100th anniversary celebration will also include a special video presentation featuring the parish elders. Those who are 80 years or older and would like to be interviewed for this presentation, should contact Santilli at (304) 476-5623 or Julie Israel at (304) 627-4006 for more information.

## Catholic Distance University Honored with Top Rankings for Undergraduate Degree Programs

Catholic Distance University recently received top rankings for its AA and BA degree programs. Forbes Advisor ranked CDU #4 in "Best Options for Theology Bachelor Degrees Online" for 2023. Intelligent.com ranked CDU #17 in "Best Online Associate in Liberal Arts Degree Programs" for 2024. These accolades confirm the great value and high quality of a CDU education, CDU officials said.

To determine rankings, the Forbes Advisor Education team sources data from the National Center for Education Statistics and the U.S.


Bureau of Labor Statistics and pulls information from reputable professional organizations and education providers' websites. They scored the four accredited, nonprofit colleges ranked using 16 data points in the categories of credibility, affordability, student outcomes, student experience, and application process. The rankings use a strict methodology to determine the best schools and programs for each category, and an expert advisory board of experienced professionals and educators reviews and verifies Forbes Advisor Education content to ensure accu-

racy and completeness.

Intelligent.com, a trusted resource for higher education program rankings and planning, evaluated a total of 3,000 programs before naming CDU's online AA degree in Liberal Arts program #17 of the top 35. Each institution was ranked on a scale from 0 to 100 across six categories that include quantitative measures such as academic quality, graduation rate, cost and ROI, and student resources. The top picks are highly regarded, affordable, and offer the tools and resources students need to successfully graduate and excel in their fields. Recognized institutions in this category offer online programs that expose students to a wide range of disciplines, fostering critical thinking, creativity, and global awareness essential in

the 21st century.

For more information, contact: Mary Kate White, communications director, at (304) 825-7517. To learn more about CDU, visit [cdu.edu](http://cdu.edu).



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# Pope Calls for 'Contextual Theology' That Responds to Modern Questions

**VATICAN CITY (CNS)** — Calling for a major push toward developing a “fundamentally contextual theology, capable of reading and interpreting the Gospel in the conditions in which men and women live each day,” Pope Francis has approved new statutes for the Pontifical Theological Academy.

The academy was founded in

1718 to train theologians; the last revision of its statutes, by St. John Paul II in 1999, asked members to pursue “the principal mission of theology today,” which, he said, “consists in promoting dialogue between Revelation and the doctrine of the faith, and in offering an ever deeper understanding of it.”

In an apostolic letter issued

“*motu proprio*,” on his own initiative, Nov. 1, Pope Francis said that in a “synodal, missionary and outgoing church,” theologians must also dialogue with other sciences and with members of other religions and that helping Catholics have a deeper understanding of the faith will be possible only if theology grapples with their questions

and concerns.

The Pontifical Academy of Theology, which works with the Dicastery for Culture and Education, is different from the International Theological Commission, a body of theologians appointed by the pope to carry out research on behalf of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

## National Vocation Awareness Week Invites the Faithful to Pray for an Increase in Vocations in the United States

**WASHINGTON** — The Catholic Church in the United States will commemorate National Vocation Awareness Week, Nov. 5-11. Each year, national Catholic organizations, dioceses, schools, and local parish communities sponsor events and provide different resources to raise awareness for vocations, and help those who are discerning a vocation, particularly one to ordained ministry or consecrated life.

In his message for the 60th anniversary of the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, Pope Francis stated, “Our common vocation to give ourselves in love develops and finds concrete expression in the life of lay men and women, devoted to raising a family as a small domestic church and working as the leaven of the Gospel to renew the different sectors of society; in the testimony of consecrated women and men who are completely committed to God for the sake of their brothers and sisters as a prophetic sign of the kingdom of God; in ordained ministers – deacons, priests, and bishops – placed at the service of preaching, prayer and fostering the communion of the holy People of God.”

Bishop Earl A. Boyea of Lansing, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations (CCLV), expressed his gratitude for holy families, ordained ministers, and consecrated men and women, saying “During this week, the Church gives thanks to God for the faithful

example of husbands and wives, and joyful witness of ordained ministers and consecrated persons. We pray that many more men and women will be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit in their hearts as they discern the mission God has for them.”

Bishop Austin A. Vetter of Helena, a member of the CCLV committee, and episcopal liaison to the National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors, National Religious Vocation Conference, and Serra International, emphasized that National Vocation Awareness Week offers us a special opportunity to “redouble our efforts of prayer that young people would be able to hear the voice — the quiet, gentle voice many times — of Jesus inviting them into a vocation as a priest or religious.”

Beginning in 1976, the U.S. bishops designated the 28th Sunday of the year as an opportunity for the Catholic Church in the United States to renew its prayerful support for those discerning an ecclesial vocation. In 2014, the CCLV committee elected to move the week to the first week of November to better engage Catholic educational institutions in the efforts to raise awareness for vocations.

Resources from the USCCB, as well as the National Religious Vocation Conference, National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors, and the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious are available on the USCCB website at <https://www.usccb.org>.

## Recognizing the Need of Catechesis for All Ages



Marie Crim Photo

Adult Faith Formation class is conducted at St. Leo Parish in Inwood.

By Marie Crim

**INWOOD**—St. Leo Parish in Inwood is offering Adult Faith Formation classes, recognizing the need to offer catechesis for all age levels. This is the third year classes are being offered.

Classes are held on both Saturdays before Mass and Sundays between Masses. Parish-

ioners have enjoyed and learned from such noted teachers as Bishop Robert Baron, Edward Sri, and Jeff Cavins. Classes consist of video presentations and discussion.

This year the class is focusing on the Eucharist, Reconciliation, stories from American Saints, and the Book of Revelation.

### Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston CONFIRMATION SCHEDULE

Fall 2023

Bishop Mark E. Brennan,  
Celebrant

Saturday, November 4:  
St. Francis Xavier,  
Parkersburg; 5:00 p.m.

Sunday, November 19:  
Sacred Heart, Bluefield;  
9:00 a.m.

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# Katie Ball Invested in Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem



Courtesy Photo

The Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, Middle Atlantic Lieutenantancy, held its annual investiture weekend of Oct. 28-29. Members of the order from the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston are pictured from left: Katie Ball, who was invested; Mark Sadd; Dominic Massimo; Matt Bowles; Wanda Franz; and Jacob Manning.

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# El Obispo Brennan reflexiona sobre la peregrinación al Santuario de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe y la Villa de las Niñas en México

**Por el obispo Mark Brennan**

Hace pocos días estuve en la ciudad de México, de Septiembre 29 al 2 de Octubre, del año en curso, con un grupo de unos 50 peregrinos, fue para mí una bendición. Los Señores Tom y Gloria Sullivan son unos queridos amigos de mi primer cargo que tuve después de ser ordenado al sacerdocio, han patrocinado esta peregrinación y nos guiaron acompañándonos.

El Sábado, nosotros visitamos la Catedral de la Anunciación de la Santísima Virgen María en el Zócalo, la gran plaza en el corazón de la vieja ciudad, con el Palacio Nacional y los edificios del gobierno Nacional al frente. Sus pequeñas capillas estilo barroco y sus reliquias de Santos, incluyendo las de los mártires Mexicanos.

También tuvimos tiempo para rezar en silencio y luego visitamos la cripta donde están enterrados los arzobispos, incluyendo Don Juan de Zumarraga, a quien en 1531 St. Juan Diego le hizo conocer el deseo de la Virgen "que le construyera un templo en el cerro del Tepeyac, y le mostro la tilma en donde dejó su imagen grabada al mostrarle las rosas que le mandaba la virgen como la prueba que le había pedido.

Después del comer nos fuimos a visitar la Basílica de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe. Donde pudimos ver muchas familias y jóvenes visitando el lugar de las apariciones de la Virgen María. Algunos de nosotros subimos el Cerro del Tepeyac, el lugar que el Obispo Juan de Zumarraga autorizó para que se

construyera la primera capilla, que aun se conserva. A un lado se encuentra un pequeño Monasterio de ocho hermanas Carmelitas descalzas, que su labor es de orar todos los días por la Iglesia, el mundo y todas las intenciones que se les pida que oren. Yo le pregunté a la hermana que nos atendió ¿qué si había algo que nosotros pudiéramos hacer por ellas? y su respuesta fue "por favor oren por nosotras". Así es que oramos por ellas una ave María antes de despedirnos.

Después bajamos a ver la Basílica moderna y el padre Bill Ryan y su supervisor concelebramos la Eucaristía en la capilla de San José. Ya habíamos tenido la oportunidad de celebrar la Eucaristía juntos en Enero de 1986, cuando íbamos de paso a Colombia a continuar nuestros estudios de la cultura hispana. Pero esta vez fue mayor porque compartimos nuestro tiempo con los peregrinos.

El día Domingo, tomamos un autobús que nos llevó a las afueras de la ciudad de México como al rededor de una hora fue el viaje a un pequeño pueblito llamado Chalco. Ahí pasamos el día en el lugar llamado Girls Town, la Villa de las Niñas.

Al rededor de tres mil niñas y jovencitas de la edad de los 13 a 18 años viven ahí y estudian por cinco años. La mayoría viene de familias de muy bajos recursos y situaciones difíciles, usualmente con solamente un padre de familia y hay veces que no tienen padres. Las hermanas de María, fueron fundadas por el Venerable Padre Aloysius

Schwartz, un sacerdote nacido y criado en Washington, DC, estas hermanas les dan un cuidado amoroso a las niñas y las ayudan a ser personas responsables y mujeres de fe. Les enseñan a rezar, las preparan para recibir los sacramentos y a participar activamente en la Misa.

Su educación no se limita nada más académicamente sino que también les enseñan a coser en maquina para que hagan su propia ropa, al cuidado de la Huerta de hortalizas y árboles frutales, a la vez aprenden las bases de plomería, electricidad, mecánica y computación. Los graduados casi siempre encuentran trabajo y ayuda a sus familias para sacarlas de la pobreza. Muchas de ellas llegan a ser maestras, enfermeras, doctoras, contadoras y algunas de ellas orientan a la congregación de las hermanas y continúan la misión.

Celebramos una misa muy bonita y alegre con las niñas y las hermanas, las cuales cantaron y tocaron sus instrumentos, guitarras, el bajo, tambores y maracas. Les di mi homilía en Español y les di un pequeño bosquejo en Inglés a los peregrinos. Las niñas después de la misa nos dieron una fiestecita en donde bailaron bailes típicos con sus trajes coloridos y hermosos. Cantaron cantos en Inglés y Español, hasta cantaron "Country Roads!" en Inglés.

Tuvimos lonche con las hermanas y enseguida bendicimos dos nuevos edificios, uno de ellos es para recibir a las exalumnas de Girls Town-que mantienen contacto con las hermanas y las vienen a visitar,

el otro es para laboratorios científico, cuarto de música, centro de computación y biblioteca. Muchas de las niñas juegan deporte como soccer, natación en una larga piscina interior. Antes de despedirnos ya en la mediodía disfrutamos de helados en una costra de coco.

Las niñas encantadas y también nosotros. Fue algo muy alentador el ver a las niñas tan felices. Ellas tienen un horario muy riguroso durante la semana. El Domingo es el día que pueden dormir hasta la 7:00 a.m. en vez de las 6:00 a.m. Les encanta el tiempo libre. Ellas van con sus familiares dos semanas durante la navidad porque su casa es con las hermanas.

Todos nosotros los peregrinos encontramos nuestra visita a la Villa de las Niñas inspiradora. En medio de un mundo en el cual existe tanta explotación de niño y niñas, nosotros pudimos observar la bondad de estas hermanas y la de sus bienhechores pudiendo promover el bienestar de las niñas tanto espiritual como material.

Se necesita mucho dinero para poder operar un lugar como es Girls Town.

Las fuentes Europeas están desapareciendo, así es que otras hay que buscar otras fuentes. Es algo que nosotros los Católicos en América pudimos ayudar a tan grande obra comenzada por uno de nosotros; un sacerdote Americano que un día llegara a ser canonizado. Si ustedes desean conocer más acerca de esta labor que las hermanas de María están haciendo favor de ir a [www.worldvillages.org](http://www.worldvillages.org).

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

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

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

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

Además de los métodos enumerados anteriormente para denunciar el abuso sexual, la Diócesis también se ha asociado con Navex Global para ofrecer la plataforma EthicsPoint para informar otras inquietudes adicionales, como sospecha de mala conducta financiera, profesional y personal de un sacerdote, diácono, religioso, o empleado laico de la Diócesis o cualquier parroquia o escuela católica en West Virginia. Se puede acceder a la plataforma EthicsPoint a través de [www.dwc.org](http://www.dwc.org), en "Rendición de cuentas", luego "Informar mala conducta" o llamando al 844.723.8381. EthicsPoint es un sistema de informes de terceros que informa a las autoridades civiles cuando corresponda y a las autoridades diocesanas, y la identidad de la persona que informa esta protegida. Enlaces e información: Departamento de Salud y Recursos Humanos de WV: <https://www.wvdhhr.org/report.asp>. Policía Estatal de Virginia Occidental, Unidad de Crímenes contra Niños: 304-293-6400.

# Ouija Boards ‘Dangerous, Dangerous’ Tools of Evil That Deny God’s Love, Say Catholic Experts

By **Gina Christian**

**(OSV News)** — Thinking of having a little “fun” by grabbing a Ouija board and ringing up Aunt Edna in the afterlife?

Think again, Catholic experts told OSV News.

“Dangerous, dangerous, dangerous,” said Dominican Father Basil Cole, professor emeritus of moral, spiritual and dogmatic theology at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington.

An Oct. 25 article in the New York Post provided a how-to guide for using a Ouija board, which purports to allow spirits to communicate by spelling out messages with a sliding pointer. First manufactured in the U.S. in 1890 amid surging popular interest in spiritualism, the Ouija board has long been marketed as a toy — yet it’s actually a tool for Satan, said Father Cole.

“Ouija boards and things like that are probably the primary way that people open up the entry point for the demonic into their lives,” said Father Vincent Lampert, exorcist for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.

The occult also is big business: From 2018 to 2023, industry revenue for psychic services rose 1.5% to \$2.3 billion, according to market research firm IBISWorld.

The mainstreaming of magic has even prompted the U.K.-based University of Exeter to begin offering a master of arts degree in magic and occult science. The university also features an interdisciplinary Center for Magic and Esotericism.

Consulting a Ouija board is “obviously an act of superstition,” and the Ouija board is “in fact a portal, an opening to receiving diabolical distortions — false ideas that somehow this board can tell you what the future is or tell you something about yourself,” Father Cole told OSV News.

The so-called “messages” from the board — which some users merely regard as their own subconscious thoughts — prime participants to being “open to receiving more dark inspirations from the evil one,” said Father Cole.

That process takes place “slowly, not immediately,” and “these portals are (therefore) introductions to further incursions of the evil one,” he said.

Father Lampert said while many “turn to a Ouija board because they think it’s kind of harmless ... they don’t really understand what they’re putting themselves up against.”

The real-life case of possession that inspired William Peter Blatty’s 1971 book (and 1973 film) “The Exorcist” began with the use of a Ouija board, noted Father Lampert, adding that such items can lead to a “person’s life ... (spiraling) downward and out of control” as “the devil shows his true face.”

Along with Ouija boards, tarot cards, fortune tellers and horoscopes also are “problems,” Father Cole warned.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that “all forms of divination” — seeking to know the future through supernatural means — are to be rejected.

That includes “recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to ‘unveil’ the future, (and) consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, interpretation of omens and lots, the phenomena of clairvoyance, and recourse to mediums,” the catechism states in No. 2116.

All such practices “conceal a desire for power over time, history, and, in the last analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate hidden powers,” it continues. “They contradict the honor, respect and loving fear that we owe to God

alone.”

While the human desire for clarity about the future is understandable, divination tools are the wrong method, said Father Cole.

“There’s nothing wrong with wanting to know God’s will,” he said. “I want to know God’s will, of course, but he’s not going to tell me about a lot of things. He will let me discover it. Conversation with God is one thing. Conversation with the evil one is another thing.”

“When people turn to the world of the occult, they’re basically saying that God is deficient, God is not enough,” Father Lampert said. “So I have to turn elsewhere for the answers that I’m looking for.”

Even devotion to the saints can mask a wrong spiritual motive, cautioned Father Cole.

“You can make a devotion to the saints replace a relationship with God — ‘I don’t trust in God anymore, but I do trust in St. Jude. He always gives me what I want.’ ... I’ve met people like that, praying to St. Jude and ignoring Mass,” said Father Cole.

But with “true devotion to the saints, you always realize they’re under the Lord Jesus and they want you to do the Lord’s will,” he said.

For those who have dabbled in the occult, there is hope, said Father Lampert.

“When we confess our sins, we place them in the hands of God, and then the devil can no longer use that against us,” he said. “So if somebody has played with a Ouija board, own it, take it to confession, give it over to God and then experience the freedom that God wants all of his children to have.”

Ouija boards and other occult items should be “destroyed so that (they don’t) fall in anyone else’s hands,” Father Lampert said. “The best thing to do is to kind of sprinkle it with holy water ... (and) burn it. If people don’t feel comfortable doing that themselves, then they should go and take it to the local parish priest who then can dispose of it.”

God is “always ready to extend his divine mercy” to those who have sinned in any way, including through occult practices, said Father Lampert.

“I like to tell people that what’s unique about Christianity is that it’s not about our search for God, but it’s about God’s search for us,” he said.

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



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