

THE CATHOLIC  
*Spirit*

# Apostolic Nuncio to the U.S. Celebrates Cathedral's 100th Anniversary Mass



Cardinal Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States, speaks to the faithful after the Mass for the 100th anniversary of the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Wheeling on April 21. Looking on is Bishop Earl K. Fernandes of the Diocese of Columbus, Ohio.

*Colleen Rowan photo*

**By Colleen Rowan**


**A**t the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Wheeling on the evening of April 21, Cardinal Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States, told West Virginia Catholics that it was a joy to be with them to celebrate the cathedral's 100th anniversary and shared the greetings of Pope Leo XIV.

"We give thanks for the faith of those who built this church..., for those who have worshipped here,

and for all that God has done in this diocese," Cardinal Pierre said in his homily for the anniversary Mass.

"The Holy Father Leo XIV cordially imparts the requested Apostolic Blessing to Rev. Fr. Penumaka Manikyalarao, and all the Faithful on the occasion of the 100th Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral of St. Joseph invoking, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, an abundance of

**See "Mass" on Page 3**




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**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



Colleen Rowan photo  
Knights of Columbus in Wheeling lead the procession to the cathedral for the anniversary Mass.

Colleen Rowan photo  
Some of the more than 40 concelebrating priests of the cathedral's anniversary Mass process into the church for the celebration.

“As we begin the centennial year marking our 100 years of faith in this cathedral, we pray that this sacred time may renew our love for Christ and his church, deepen our unity as a diocesan family, and inspire us to carry forward the gospel with renewed zeal and hope as pilgrims of faith for generations to come.”

—Bishop Mark Brennan, Mass for the 100th anniversary of the Cathedral of St. Joseph, Wheeling

## Mass ...

Cont'd from Page 1

divine graces.” This was featured in the worship aid for the Mass.

It was standing-room only for this milestone of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston's mother church with many looking on from the widows of the triforium. Bishop Mark Brennan, along with the cathedral's rector, Father Penumaka Manikyalarao, welcomed all as well as those watching the livestream at home. The diocese is most grateful to Cardinal Pierre for serving as principal celebrant and homilist of the Mass, Bishop Brennan said as he welcomed the nuncio and Bishop Earl K. Fernandes of the Diocese of Columbus, Ohio, who was a concelebrant.

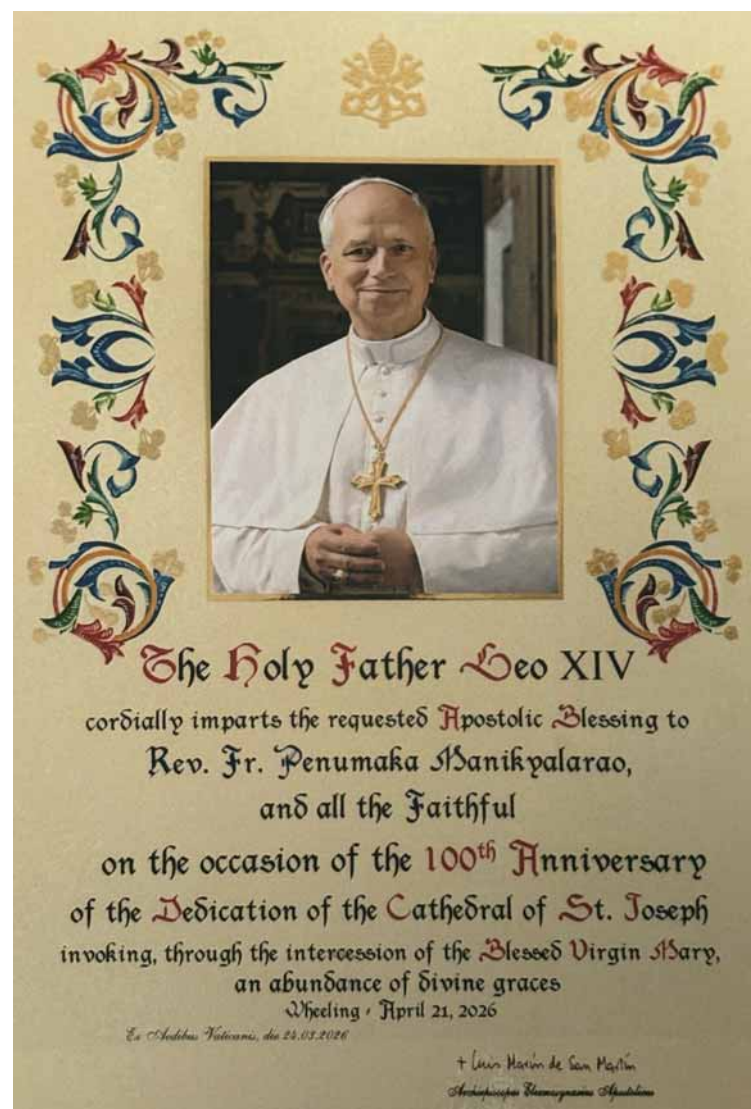
Seated in the front row were special guests — Art McAuley, Margaret Campbell, and Barbara Emery — the grandchildren of the cathedral's architect, Edward J. Weber. They

served as gift bearers for the Mass. Bishop Brennan introduced them and said Weber “designed a magnificent place in which we can gather to worship God.”

Bishop Brennan gave a special welcome to his brother priests and deacons, religious women, and the cathedral's parish family of past and present.

“We acknowledge with gratitude those who have served in this cathedral parish in years past and helped to shape its life and mission,” the bishop said. “As we begin the centennial year marking our 100 years of faith in this cathedral, we pray that this sacred time may renew our love for Christ and his church, deepen our unity as a diocesan family, and inspire us to carry forward the gospel with renewed zeal and hope as pilgrims of faith for generations to come.”

On this day of celebration, Cardinal Pierre said in his homily, the word of God is **See “Mass” on Page 4**



Courtesy photo  
The Apostolic Blessing from Pope Leo XIV is shown above.

## Mass ...

**Cont'd from Page 3**

inviting all to do more—to ask what this cathedral means, what God is showing us here. The readings, he said, provide a beautiful path.

“God is making all things new,” the cardinal said, and the church is a sign of that new creation.

“This cathedral exists to serve that mystery and those who are formed here must go forth on mission,” he said. “In St. Joseph, whose name this cathedral bears, we see a model of how to live that mission.”

He referenced the first reading for the Mass, Revelation 21: 1-5, “The New Heaven and the New Earth.” This is a new creation in which God’s dwelling is with the human race, the cardinal said, the destiny toward which God is doing all things restored, communion between God and humanity, the fulfillment of his Kingdom, eternal life. It is for this, he said, that the father sent his son. And in Jesus Christ, the cardinal said, God truly came to dwell with the human race, so fully that he became man. In him, the new creation has already begun, the cardinal said. Marks of the old order are still with us, he said; there is still sin. But God has come near, he said, and by entering our history he has opened to us the life of his Kingdom.

“That is why the church matters so much,” Cardinal Pierre said. “The church, established by Christ, is meant to be a sign of this new creation. And don’t forget, we are the church. She is meant to show, even now, what life can be like when human beings and God live in communion.”

St. Paul, the cardinal said, expresses this very simply in the second reading for the Mass (1 Corinthians 3: 9-11, 16-17) — you are “God’s building.”

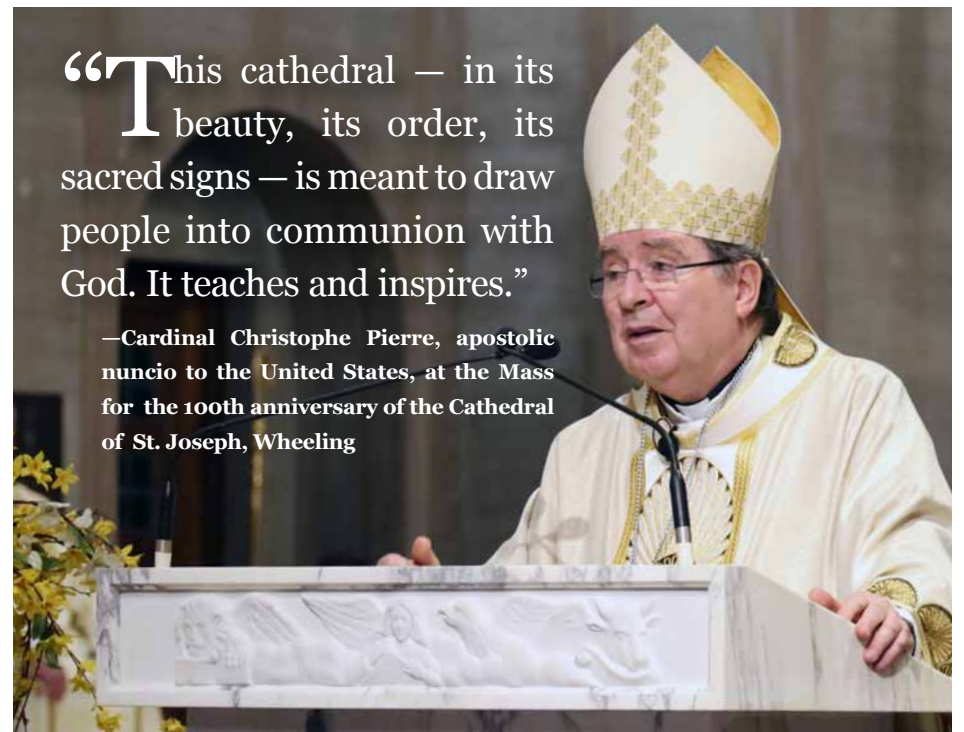
Cardinal Pierre asked the people if they know that they are the temple of God, that the spirit of God dwells in them.

“This means that God does not merely gather us into a building,” the nuncio said. “He decides to build us up as his people. He does not merely bring us to the holy place, he desires to make us holy.”

The church, then, is not an institution in the worldly sense or just a collection of like-minded people, he said. The church is the people in whom God desires to stay, he said, to dwell.

This, Cardinal Pierre said, helps us understand what a cathedral is for.

“This cathedral — in its beauty, its order, its sacred signs — is meant to draw people into communion with God,” he said. “It teaches and inspires. ... A church like this lifts the heart and reminds us that we are made for more. We are made for God. And here, in God’s house, God forms us more deeply as his people. Here, we are sanctified by contact with the living God, present in his word and in the sacraments. Here, we are washed in the waters of rebirth. Here, we are nourished by the Body and Blood



“This cathedral — in its beauty, its order, its sacred signs — is meant to draw people into communion with God. It teaches and inspires.”

—Cardinal Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States, at the Mass for the 100th anniversary of the Cathedral of St. Joseph, Wheeling

Colleen Rowan photo

Cardinal Christophe Pierre offers his homily at the anniversary Mass.

of Christ. Here, the church is built up as the people in whom God dwells. So, yes, today we give thanks for this cathedral of stone

and marble, but even more we give thanks for what God has done and continues to do through it.”

**See “Mass” on Page 5**



Colleen Rowan photo  
Cardinal Pierre blesses those gathered at the anniversary Mass.



Colleen Rowan photo

Cardinal Pierre celebrates the anniversary Mass with more than 40 priests of the diocese concelebrating.

## Mass ...

**Cont'd from Page 4**

The Christian life cannot stop here, the nuncio stressed. The Catholic faithful do not come into the house of God and remain within it. Being formed here as God's people, the cardinal said, the faithful are

also sent from here.

"What we receive here is not meant to be kept for ourselves but carried outward," Cardinal Pierre told the congregation. "Christ gathers us here in order to send us forth."

As Pope Leo has written, the cardinal continued, the church must

continue her missionary journey with joy and zeal in the Holy Spirit. And this is exactly the point, Cardinal Pierre said, the church goes out not in conquest or self assertion but with the joy and zeal that come from having first received the love of God.

"And here, St. Joseph becomes

for us not only a patron but a teacher," the cardinal said. Scripture calls him a righteous man, he added, and one with a heart open to God.

"Listening for God's word he discerned what God was asking of him and obeyed," the cardinal said. "He took Mary as his wife,

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## Mass ...

**Cont'd from Page 5**

received the mystery entrusted to him and became the guardian of the Redeemer without placing himself at the center as we usually do. He accepted what came from God and faithfully carried out the mission he was given.

"In this, Joseph is a model for the church," he said. "She too must listen before she speaks ... receive before she acts, and go where God sends her. That is how the church remains faithful. This is how she becomes missionary. That is how she helps make visible, even now, the new creation that God is bringing about in Christ.

**See "Mass" on Page 7**



At the cathedral's 100th anniversary Mass are, counterclockwise from top left: Art McAuley, Margaret Campbell, and Barbara Emery—the grandchildren of the cathedral's architect, Edward J. Weber; attendees look on from the triforium; Sisters of the Congregation of St. Joseph; faithful praying; Roberta Petrella offers the intentions; and Luke Minor leads the procession at the end of the Mass.

Colleen Rowan photos



Colleen Rowan photo

The Cathedral of St. Joseph is packed for the anniversary Mass.

## Mass ...

**Cont'd from Page 6**

“As we give thanks today for the 100 years of this beautiful cathedral, let us ask not only how it was built but what it is still building today — a people in whom God dwells, a people

who know his presence, a people ready to go forth with the gospel,” Cardinal Pierre said. “That is the grace we ask today, through the intercession of St. Joseph, that this local church may continue to be a sign of the new creation begun in Christ and that all of us formed here by the word and by the sacraments may go

forth with joy and zeal in the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

More than 40 priests concelebrated the Mass with designated concelebrants: Very Rev. John Rice, V.G., V.F.; Very Rev. Sebastian Devasya, V.E., Very Rev. Donald X. Higgs, Assoc. V.E., V.F.;

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Colleen Rowan photo

Bishop Earl Fernandes, Cardinal Christophe Pierre, and Bishop Mark Brennan (top, from left), clergy, and altar servers are shown after the Mass for the 100th anniversary of the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Wheeling.

## Mass ...

**Cont'd from Page 7**

Very Rev. Justin M. Golna, J.C.L., J.V.; Father Manikylarao; and Father John Soplinski, vice rector of the cathedral. Seven deacons also par-

ticipated with Deacon Jacob Manning and Deacon Douglas Breiding serving as deacon of the word and deacon of the Eucharist. Tyler J. Greenwood served as master of ceremonies.

Bishop Brennan also welcomed to the Mass leaders of other Wheeling faith communities,

including Rabbi Joshua B. Lief of Temple Shalom, the Rev. Josh Saxe of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, and Bishop Darrell W. Cummings of Bethlehem Church and of his congregation in South Africa.

A reception was held following the Mass.

# Discovering the Cathedral:

AN EVENING OF HISTORY, FAITH, AND BEAUTY

*Led by*  
**Fr. Larry Dorsch**  
*Previous Rector of the Cathedral*

**Tuesday, May 5, 2026**  
at 6:00 p.m.

The evening will feature a *guided tour* of the Cathedral combined with *scripture, prayer, and music.*

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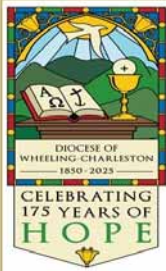
*Speaker: Fr Rex Marfil*

**Program Outline**

Starting time: 6:00 pm in the church

Date	Topic
April 29	<b>The Power of Resurrection:</b> <i>A reflection on the reality of the resurrection and its impact on fear and doubt of the Apostles and Disciples.</i>
May 7	<b>Final Instructions and Empowerment:</b> <i>After his resurrection, Jesus reorients the Disciples to trust in Him, in his Authority and Intercession.</i>
May 14	<b>Advent and Anticipation:</b> <i>After Jesus' ascension, the apostles returned to Jerusalem, spending time in prayer in the upper room while awaiting the Holy Spirit.</i>
May 21	<b>Pentecost-Empowerment by the Holy Spirit:</b> <i>Empowerment by the Holy Spirit. Emphasizing spiritual growth, bold faith, and the mission of the Church.</i>

# Events Celebrating the 175th Anniversary of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston



## Martinsburg Vicariate Gathering:

Celebrating the 175th Anniversary of the Diocese

**Tuesday: April 28, 2026**

St. Vincent De Paul Parish

67 Liberty St. Berkeley Springs WV

Mass at 6:00pm

Celebrated by Bishop Brennan and priests of the Martinsburg Vicariate

Reception to follow the Mass

*All are welcome!!*

## Special Mass for the Charleston Vicariate

*Honor Priests Celebrating Anniversaries of Ordination and Celebrate our Diocese's 175th Anniversary*

**CHARLESTON**—All are invited to attend a Mass at the Basilica of the Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart (Charleston) as this will be a special celebration held during the annual Priest Convocation and will honor several priests who are celebrating significant anniversaries of priestly ordination and service. As well, this will be an opportunity to celebrate our diocese's 175th anniversary as we continue our yearlong celebration which began in July 2025. It would be wonderful to see a great turnout for this Mass to thank our priests for their impactful ministry across our diocese. The Mass will be celebrated at 5 p.m. on Wednesday, May 6.

At right is the Prayer for the 175th Anniversary of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston composed by Chad Carter (Chancellor of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston) and Shirley Carter (Director of the Department of Faith Formation). Find more resources on the anniversary, hymn documents, parish resources, stories on the diocese's history, and a video message from Bishop Mark Brennan at <https://dwc.org/175th/>



### Prayer for the 175th Anniversary of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston

God of all times and places,

We praise and thank you for the 175 years we have spent around the table of your Son in these hills and valleys of West Virginia.

You have walked with us through every season—guiding our ancestors, building up communities of faith, and forming hearts for discipleship.

As we give thanks for all who have gone before us, we ask You now to renew us in the present and continue to form us as a people of hope. Deepen our faith, strengthen our unity, and enliven our commitment to sharing the Gospel.

As we look to the future, we ask for the grace to be bold in mission. Send us forth with open hearts, ready to meet the needs of our neighbors, to be instruments of justice and peace.

As we continue on the journey, may we go forward as pilgrims of hope united in the Spirit, and empowered by faith that grows, hope that endures, and love that transforms.

We make this prayer through the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, St. Joseph, patron of our diocese and with all the saints who have walked this path before us, keep us ever close to You—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—now and forever.

Amen.



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# From Vision to Action: ‘Women of the Way’ Council Takes Shape

By Joyce Bibey, courtesy of FaithInWV

**CHARLESTON**—After months of preparation a Diocesan Pastoral Council of Women: Women of the Way has been established, and last week held its inaugural organizational meeting at St. John XXIII Pastoral Center in Charleston.

A group of women from across the diocese met to create a structured guideline that will help to move Women of the Way from vision – action. Gina Boggess of Sacred Heart in Bluefield, Carol Cofer of Sacred Heart in Princeton, Sr. Paula Ude, a professor at Concord University, and Sr. Martha Gomez of the Chancery make up the executive team under Bishop Mark Brennan with Fr. Sebastian Devasya as the spiritual leader.

Last year, Bishop Mark met with Sister Martha with the goal to develop a diocesan women’s leadership group to empower Catholic women of all backgrounds across the state, while building a united sisterhood grounded in faith and transformed by God.

At last week’s meeting, Bishop Mark encouraged the women gathered by the leadership team to work together to help their peers in every vicariate of the diocese to be leaders, evangelizers, and spiritual companions on the journey of faith.

Whether you are single, married, working, retired, elderly, in a religious community, a caretaker, a mother, or a grandmother Women of the Way aims to connect and inspire through our common bond – Christ.

The name Women of the Way is from Acts 9:2, describing early Christians as “followers of the Way.” Women have a vital role throughout the salvation history from our Blessed Mother to the women who followed Jesus, to our faithful women in the pews today.

How will it work? Women of the Way will:

- Encourage and strengthen existing women’s groups within

parishes

- Assist parishes in establishing a women’s group where none currently exist

- Provide support, resources, and tools for women in need

- Serve as a compassionate voice for the voiceless, bringing women’s concerns and hopes to the attention of diocesan leadership.

Featured presenters for the weekend included Bishop Mark; Kathy Barton, director of the office of Social Ministries in our Diocese; Sister Rose Ann Hefner, CSJ; Sarah McNeely, Co-Chair Immaculate Conception Women’s Ministry; and Enid Roman-De Jesus, Director of the Office of Hispanic Ministry.

Deacons from around the state gathered with the group for prayer, and the weekend concluded with Mass on Sunday with Fr. John H. Finnell as celebrant.

### *Prayer for Women of the Way: Gracious and loving God,*

We gather at this inaugural meeting of the Women of the Way Diocesan Women’s Council with hearts full of gratitude and hope. We thank you for calling us together in faith, in purpose, and in love.

We give thanks for the faithful women who have gone before us – for the Blessed Mother, whose “yes” changed the world, for Mary Magdalene, first witness to the Resurrection, for the women who followed Jesus with courage and devotion, for the saints who lived lives of bold faith, and for our grandmothers, mother, and mentors who guided us, prayed for us, and showed us the way.

Their witness surrounds us like a great cloud of grace, reminding us that we do not walk this road alone.

Lord, as Woman of the Way, help us to walk together - to support one another, to listen with compassion, to lead with humility, and to serve with joyful hearts.

May we be your hands and feet,

doing Your work here on earth— hands of compassion, hands of action, hands of loving touch; feet that move with purpose, feet steady and secure on the path of faith.

Bless each woman here today, and those whom You are calling to join us.

Bless our families and our work - spiritually, emotionally, and physically.

Pour out upon us all the graces we need to carry out the mission entrusted to us.

Strengthen us in times of uncertainty, unite us in our shared mission, and inspire us to be bearers of Your light in our communities.

May our work reflect Your love,

our words speak Your truth,

And our lives witness to Your mercy.

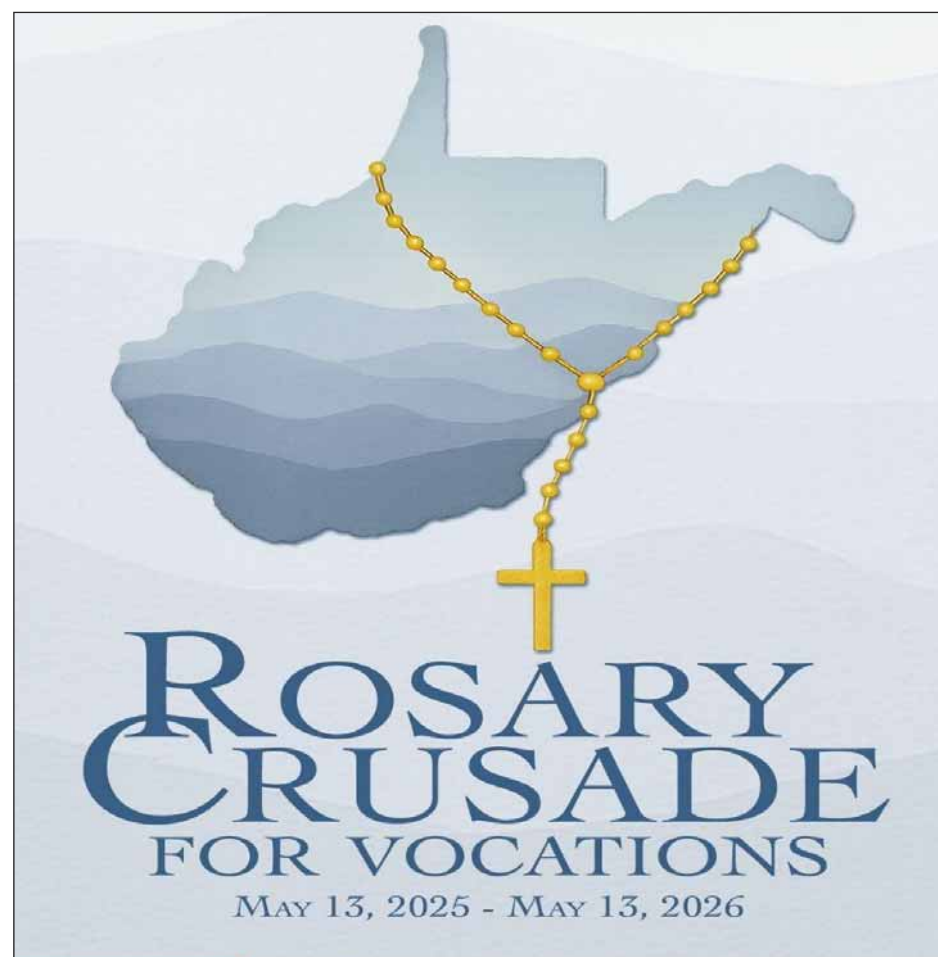
Guide this council in wisdom and purpose, so that all we do may honor You and uplift Your people.

We place this journey in Your Hands, trusting in Your grace every step of the way.

We ask this in your Holy Name. Amen

We ask our Holy Mother, “Come as we journey along our way, Santa Maria come.”


Looking forward to the next zoom meeting where these brave women will step forward to make this dream possible to serve the social concerns affecting Women in West Virginia.



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# Bishops' Pro-Life Chair Concerned About 'Uneven Enforcement' of Face Act after DOJ Report

By **Kate Scanlon**

**WASHINGTON (OSV News)** — Bishop Daniel E. Thomas of Toledo, Ohio, chairman of the U.S. bishops' pro-life committee, expressed concern about the federal Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, or FACE Act, and its "uneven application."

His comments came after the Department of Justice released a report April 14 alleging the Biden administration "weaponized" the federal law, which was crafted to protect access to both reproductive health facilities and houses of worship.

Bishop Thomas, who chairs the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, told OSV News he is "thankful for the DOJ's investigation into enforcement of the FACE Act."

In its 882-page report, the DOJ accuses the Biden administration of weaponizing the FACE Act by collaborating with groups that support legal abortion to target pro-life organizations and individuals, and that in some criminal cases there were disproportionate sentences for pro-life defendants and defendants who support abortion.

However, some of the communications and actions detailed in the report took place in 2020 and January 2021, the final months of Trump's first term.

Then-President Bill Clinton signed the FACE Act into law in 1994. It seeks to protect reproductive health facilities by prohibiting actions such as obstructing the entrance. As a compromise, Congress also included protections for houses of worship in that law.

Noting the USCCB opposed the legislation when it was passed in 1994, Bishop Thomas argued the bishops did so because "there are other laws that can deter violence, and we expressed concern about uneven enforcement of the Act that could punish peaceful pro-life protesters and protect abortion businesses."

After the U.S. Supreme Court's *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision in June 2022, which overturned its previous abortion precedent in *Roe v. Wade*, the Biden administration pursued prosecutions under the FACE Act as part of what it called its "whole-of-government" response to protect abortion access. However, abortion opponents said the Biden administration weaponized that law, arguing they did not pursue proportionate charges against those who vandalized pro-life facilities or churches.

"The DOJ's investigation confirms that advocates for life weren't provided with equal justice," Bishop Thomas said. "Pro-life Catholics will continue to advocate for the most vulnerable in the womb and serve mothers with the love and support they deserve, especially through pregnancy help centers."

Acting U.S. Attorney General Todd Blanche told NBC News that the report showed under the Biden administration, the DOJ was "working very closely with outside organizations" to "go after individuals who were pro-life."

The DOJ's report comes as that department faces scrutiny from some pro-life leaders for recent filings asking courts to dismiss or pause state lawsuits to roll back the Biden administration's eased restrictions on mifepristone, a drug commonly used for first trimester abortion, but which is also used in some miscarriage care protocols.

Separately, former CNN anchor Don Lemon was charged with violating the FACE Act in the disruption of a church service in St. Paul, Minnesota, as part of a protest of the Trump administration's immigration crackdown in that area. Lemon has argued he was there as a journalist.

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



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# Lebanon: Israeli Military to Investigate Soldier Who Destroyed Jesus Statue Amid Backlash

**By Junno Arocho Esteves**

**(OSV News)** — Catholic leaders in the Holy Land expressed their “unreserved condemnation” after a picture of an Israeli soldier striking the head of a statue of Jesus in Debel, a Christian village in southern Lebanon, went viral on social media.

In a statement signed by Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, issued April 20, the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land expressed its “profound indignation and unreserved condemnation of the desecration of a representation of Jesus Crucified by an Israeli soldier in a Lebanese village.”

“This act constitutes a grave affront to the Christian faith and adds to other reported incidents of desecration of Christian symbols by IDF soldiers in southern Lebanon.” It also reveals “a disturbing failure in moral and human formation, wherein even the most elementary reverence for the sacred and for the dignity of others has been gravely compromised.”

Israeli authorities condemned the actions of an Israeli soldier who desecrated the statue of Jesus in a Lebanese village to which Israel denied humanitarian access for weeks.

The Israel Defense Force, or IDF, said it was investigating the destruction of a statue of Jesus after a photo published online showed

an Israeli soldier desecrating the image in southern Lebanon.

In a statement published on April 19, the IDF said an initial examination confirmed the photo’s authenticity, stating that it “views the incident with great severity and emphasizes that the soldier’s conduct is wholly inconsistent with the values expected of its troops.”

“The incident is being investigated by the Northern Command and is currently being addressed through the chain of command. Appropriate measures will be taken against those involved in accordance with the findings,” the IDF said.

The photo, which was posted to X by Palestinian journalist Younis Tirawi, showed an Israeli soldier striking the head of a statue of Jesus crucified with a sledgehammer.

In a subsequent post, Tirawi identified the incident location as Debel, a village roughly 54 miles south of Beirut. A Facebook page from Debel shared by the journalist posted a picture of the statue before its destruction, along with the words: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

“The Assembly calls for immediate and decisive disciplinary action, a credible process of accountability, and clear assurances that such conduct will neither be tolerated nor repeated,” the Catholic



**An Israeli soldier is seen destroying a statue of Jesus in Debel, Lebanon, April 19, 2026. The Israel Defense Force on April 19 confirmed the authenticity of the photo, which was posted on X by Palestinian journalist Younis Tirawi.**

OSV News photo/x.com via Reuters

leaders of the Holy Land said in their April 20 statement.

Debel is a Christian village to which Pope Leo sent a message of closeness April 7, citing the “dramatic circumstances” the people of the village “are experiencing.”

Signed by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican’s secretary of state, and published in French, the message said the pope “extends his message of consolation

and compassion to all Christians in South Lebanon and to all those suffering the consequences of the war.”

“Today, we celebrate the resurrection of the Lord,” Pope Leo said. “May you, amidst feelings of sorrow, anguish, and mourning, experience a deeper joy in your hearts today: Jesus has gloriously triumphed over death. It is a joy that comes from heaven and that nothing can take from

you.”

Catholic Near East Welfare Association-Pontifical Mission, or CNEWA, cares for 430 Maronite Catholic families in Debel, 425 Christian families in the village of Ain Ebel, and 1,400 Maronite Catholic families in Rmeich.

Aid convoys the agency tried to send both before and after Easter did not receive permission for safe passage and were scheduled **See “Backlash” on Page 13**

## Backlash ...

**Cont'd from Page 12**

to attempt passage in the week following Divine Mercy Sunday, April 12, and OSV News is awaiting confirmation on whether they were able to pass.

Reuters news agency confirmed that the cross smashed by an Israeli soldier was part of a small shrine in the garden of a family living on the edge of the village, said Father Fadi Falfel, a priest in Debel.

"One of the Israeli soldiers broke the cross and did this horrible thing, this desecration of our holy symbols," he told Reuters.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in an April 20 X post: "I condemn the act in the strongest terms."

"Israel cherishes and upholds the Jewish values of tolerance and mutual respect between Jews and worshippers of all faiths," the Israeli prime minister said, adding that "like the overwhelming majority of Israelis," he was "stunned and saddened to learn that an IDF soldier damaged a Catholic religious icon in southern Lebanon."

He said the IDF "will take appropriately harsh disciplinary action against the offender."

"We express regret for the incident and for any hurt this has caused to believers in Lebanon and around the world," Netanyahu said.

U.S. Ambassador to Israel

Mike Huckabee took to X to say, "Swift, severe, & public consequences are needed" to address the incident.

While Netanyahu said on X that "the Christian population in Israel thrives unlike elsewhere in the Middle East" and that "Israel is the only place in the Middle East that adheres to freedom of worship for all," religious freedom organizations cite a long list of past acts against Christian symbols and attacks on Christians in Israel.

According to the Religious Freedom Data Center, a Jerusalem-based group that documents incidents affecting religious freedom, particularly against Christians, an estimated 181 incidents of "harassment targeting Christians, Christian symbols, and Christian institutions" were committed in Israel in 2025.

The group also reported an additional 44 incidents between January and March 2026.

The outrage online prompted an initial response from IDF spokesman Lt. Col. Nadav Shoshani, who said that the actions of the soldier "do not align with the IDF's values and the behavior expected of IDF soldiers" should the image be proven real.

Following the IDF's confirmation of the photo's authenticity, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar called the soldier's desecration "grave and disgraceful" and apologized "to every Christian whose feelings

were hurt."

Commending the IDF for its investigation, Sa'ar said via X he was "confident that the necessary strict measures will be taken against whoever carried out this ugly act."

Antonio Tajani, Italy's foreign minister, welcomed Sa'ar's statement on "the serious act committed by an IDF soldier."

Tajani said the destruction of the statue was a "violent act of aggression against Christians, who in the Middle East represent an instrument of peace."

"It is an unacceptable episode that we hope will never be repeated," Tajani wrote on X. "Profaning the symbols of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam is not a demonstration of strength but only of weakness, contrary to all principles in favor of freedom and interreligious dialogue."

While there has been no official statement from the Catholic leaders in Lebanon, Wadie Abunassar, coordinator of the Holy Land Christian Forum, said in an interview with Israeli news website Ynet that the soldier's actions were "truly revolting."

"I prayed it wasn't real. The aggression in the image and what emerges from the footage is very severe and disturbing," he said. "When something that is in the depths of your soul is harmed, you cannot remain indifferent."

The Assembly of Catholic

Ordinaries of the Holy Land said in its statement that "even in the face of such offense, the Cross remains unassailable in its meaning ... a source of dignity, hope, and redemption, and as a summons to overcome violence through sacrificial love."

The assembly renewed a call "to bring to an end the war that has tormented this region for far too long and to embrace a path where peace is witnessed in restraint, dialogue, responsibility, and reverence for the sacred and for every human life."

OSV News reached out for comment to Matteo Bruni, director of the Holy See Press Office, and is awaiting answer.

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

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## Essentials for Disaster Case Managers 2-Day Training

### Training Details

**DATE:**  
May 18 & 19, 2026

**LOCATION:**  
Catholic Charities WV  
2000 Main Street  
Wheeling, WV 26003

**TIME:**  
9:00am - 4:00pm

**QUESTIONS:**  
[lpierce@ccwva.org](mailto:lpierce@ccwva.org)  
[idyer@ccwva.org](mailto:idyer@ccwva.org)

### Training Description

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

### Who Should Attend?

- Case Managers who will provide service to disaster victims
- Supervisors of disaster case managers
- Long-term recovery group representatives
- Community members interested in volunteer disaster case management

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# Celebrating a Year of Blessing from the Christ Child Jesus

The Basilica of the Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Charleston held the Annual Diocesan Shrine Novena of the Santo Niño April 11-19. Celebrating a Year of Blessing from the Christ Child Jesus, each day included Mass followed by Novena/Benediction and devotion celebrated by visiting priests.

Father Prakash Kerketta, assoc. rector of the Basilica Co-Cathedral and chaplain of Charleston Catholic High School, opened the first night of the celebration. Subsequent evenings were celebrated by Father Rex Marfil and Father Lusius Mite, S.V.D., both parochial vicars at St. Michael Parish in Wheeling; Father Rene Gerona, S.V.D., pastor of St. John the Evangelist Parish in Summersville; Father Roy Kurakula, pastor of St. Matthew Parish in Ravenswood and Sacred Heart Mission in Point Pleasant; Father Neil Buchlein, pastor of St. Mary Queen of Heaven Parish in Madison, St. Barbara Mission in Chapmanville, and St. Joseph the Worker Chapel in Whitesville; Father Rey D. Landicho, pastor of St. Peter Parish in Welch, Sacred Heart Mission in Pothatan, Our Lady of Victory Chapel in Gary, and Holy Cross Chapel in Pineville; Father Philip Szabo, pastor of St. Agnes in Charleston; and Father Binu Emmanuel, CST, pas-



Martina Hart Photo

The procession is held on the final night of the Annual Diocesan Shrine Novena of the Santo Niño April 19 at the Basilica of the Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Charleston. Bearers of the statue of Santo Niño are: from front left, Jack Walsh, Sam Willson, and Perry Lee; and from front right, Bill Salutillo, Kyle Mork, and Marcin Karcz.

tor of St. Luke the Evangelist Parish in Cheat Lake. The final night was celebrated by Very Rev. Donald X. Higgs, Assoc. V.E., V.F.,

rector of the Basilica Co-Cathedral, and concelebrated by Father Kerketta.

A reception was held each night in the Msgr. P

Edward Sadie Gathering Space. The Basilica of the Co-Cathedral is Pilgrimage Site for the Diocesan Shrine of Santo Niño.



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Catholic Charities West Virginia (CCWVa) thanks the Pleasants Community Foundation, Inc. for a \$2,000 grant supporting CCWVa's Mobile Food Pantry in Pleasants County.

The pantry holds monthly distributions in the town of Belmont and serves about 35 households each month, reaching nearly 100 households a year. In the past 12 months, the program has distributed almost 20,000 pounds of food to local residents. About 20% of those served are children and 11% are seniors.

"Our Mobile Food Pantry brings food directly into commu-

nities where access can be limited," CCWVa officials said. "This work depends on generous partners and dedicated volunteers."

If you or someone you know could use this service, or if you would like to volunteer, contact Catholic Charities West Virginia to learn more about upcoming distributions at [www.ccwva.org](http://www.ccwva.org).

**Representatives of the Pleasants Community Foundation, Inc., present a \$2,000 grant to Catholic Charities West Virginia officials for CCWVa's Mobile Food Pantry in Pleasants County.**

Courtesy photo



2026

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- Sunday, May 17 8:00 AM – 12:00 PM

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### FOOD PROVIDED:

- Saturday: Lunch for neighbors and volunteers
- Sunday: Picnic lunch at 12:30 PM for all volunteers

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# Pope Leo XIV Honors Pope Francis on Death Anniversary, Recalling His Mercy and Closeness to ‘The Little Ones’

By Courtney Mares

**ABOARD THE PAPAL PLANE (OSV News)** — Flying over the west coast of central Africa on April 21, Pope Leo XIV paused to honor his predecessor on the first anniversary of Pope Francis’ death, remembering the Argentine pope’s witness to mercy and closeness to the poor.

On the papal flight from Luanda, Angola, to Malabo, the capital of Equatorial Guinea, Pope Leo XIV spoke to journalists traveling with him, reflecting on the legacy of Pope Francis, who died April 21, 2025.

“I would like to remember, on this first anniversary of his death, Pope Francis, who gave so much to the church with his life, his testimony, his words, and his gestures,” Pope Leo told reporters, speaking in Italian.

He recalled how Pope Francis truly lived with “closeness to the poorest, the little ones, the sick, the children, the elderly.”

“We can also remember his message of mercy,” Pope Leo said, remembering in particular how his predecessor invited the entire Church to join in the “beautiful celebration of an extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy.”

Pope Francis, born Jorge Mario Bergoglio on Dec. 17, 1936, in Buenos Aires, led the Catholic Church from March 13, 2013, until his death on Easter Monday 2025. He was the first Jesuit pope and the first pope from Latin America.

The late pope’s final public appearance was on Easter Sunday, April 20, 2025, when he unexpectedly came out on the central loggia of St. Peter’s Basilica, raising his hands to wave to thousands of faithful gathered below in the square.

“Happy Easter,” he told the crowd, before delivering what would be his last Easter blessing, “urbi et orbi,” to the city and the

world. The visibly frail pope then boarded his popemobile for a final pass through the square to greet the faithful.

“We pray that he is already enjoying the mercy of the Lord and we thank the Lord for the great gift of Francis’ life to the whole Church and to the whole world,” Pope Leo said on the flight.

In Rome, the anniversary of Pope Francis’ death will be marked with a Mass held in the Basilica of St. Mary Major, the final resting place of the late pope.

Pope Leo reflected on this predecessor’s legacy on the papal flight to Equatorial Guinea, the last African country on the pope’s 11-day apostolic journey to the continent.

After his tribute, the pope responded to three questions from Angolan journalists about his experience in their country.

Pope Leo said that it was “a joy to see the places in the world where the Church is growing,” noting that is not the case in other parts of the world, underlining that this is “a call to evangelization, to continue to announce the Gospel and to try to invite others, not with proselytism as Pope Francis said so many times, but with the beauty, the attraction of faith.”

“The joy of believers is one of the best announcements of faith, of the Gospel,” he added.

Asked about the possibility of new African cardinal appointments, Pope Leo said that “this is a question that many want to ask,” noting that it’s “still not decided yet when new cardinals will be created.”

“We must look at the question at the global level,” he said. “We hope that for Africa, and also for Angola, in the future — I’m not saying the next one, a bit further on — but we can consider the creation of new cardinals also for Angola.”

Speaking at roughly 30,000 feet,

the pope also wished happy birthday to two journalists on the plane who are traveling as part of the Vatican press corps.

During the papal trip to four countries in Africa, Pope Leo has been flexing his language skills, preaching Masses and giving speeches in French, English, and Portuguese. On each flight to a new country, Pope Leo has spoken to journalists aboard the papal plane in either English or Italian.

In his final destination, the pope will add another language to that list, as Equatorial Guinea is the only Spanish-speaking country in Africa.

Pope Leo’s April 21–23 visit to Equatorial Guinea will be only the second papal visit to the country; the first was by St. John Paul II in 1982.

The papal visit coincides with the 170th anniversary of evangelization in the country, where roughly 75% of the 1.67 million population is Catholic.

In Equatorial Guinea, Pope Leo will stop at a psychiatric hospital in the capital Malabo, visit a prison in Bata, and pray at a memorial to victims of a 2021 military base explosion that killed more than 100 people. A papal Mass in Mongomo at the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception is expected to draw 100,000 Catholics.

Sister Francine Hien of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Immaculate told OSV News the Christian-majority country was awaiting the pope’s arrival with “enthusiasm, expectations, zeal and joy.”

(Courtney Mares is Vatican editor for OSV News.)

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Sunday, April 26: St. Brendan, Elkins, 11 a.m.

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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## El Papa León XIV rinde homenaje al Papa Francisco en el aniversario de su fallecimiento, recordando su misericordia y su cercanía hacia 'los más pequeños'

Por Courtney Mares

**A BORDO DEL AVIÓN PAPAL (OSV News)** — Mientras sobrevolaba la costa occidental de África Central el 21 de abril, el Papa León XIV hizo una pausa para honrar a su predecesor en el primer aniversario de la muerte del Papa Francisco, recordando el testimonio de misericordia y cercanía a los pobres del Papa argentino.

En el vuelo Papal de Luanda, Angola, a Malabo, la capital de Guinea Ecuatorial, el Papa León habló con los periodistas que viajaban con él, reflexionando sobre el legado del Papa Francisco, quien falleció el 21 de abril de 2025.

"Antes que nada, quisiera recordar al Papa Francisco, en su primer aniversario de fallecimiento. Con su vida, Él donó tanto a la Iglesia, su testimonio, su palabra y sus gestos", dijo el Papa León a los periodistas, hablando en italiano.

Recordó cómo el Papa Francisco vivió verdaderamente "la cercanía a los más pobres, a los más pequeños, a los enfermos, a los niños, a los ancianos".

También podemos recordar su mensaje de misericordia, dijo el Papa León, recordando momentos en los que el Papa Francisco predicó sobre la misericordia de Dios, y "cómo habló desde el corazón de este gran amor, del perdón, que es la generosa expresión de la misericordia del Señor". En particular, recordó cómo su predecesor invitó a toda la Iglesia a unirse a la "hermosa celebración del Jubileo Extraordinario

de la Misericordia".

El Papa Francisco, cuyo nombre de nacimiento era Jorge Mario Bergoglio, nació el 17 de diciembre de 1936 en Buenos Aires y dirigió la Iglesia Católica desde el 13 de marzo de 2013 hasta su fallecimiento el Lunes de Pascua de 2025. Fue el primer Papa jesuita y el primer Papa de América Latina.

La última aparición pública del difunto pontífice fue el Domingo de Pascua, 20 de abril de 2025, cuando salió inesperadamente a la logia central de la Basílica de San Pedro, levantando las manos para saludar a los miles de fieles reunidos abajo en la plaza.

"Feliz Pascua", dijo a la multitud, antes de impartir la que sería su última bendición de Pascua, "urbi et orbi", a la ciudad y al mundo. El Papa, visiblemente frágil, subió entonces a su papamóvil para dar una última vuelta por la plaza y saludar a los fieles.

"Recemos porque esté disfrutando de la misericordia del Señor y demos gracias a Dios por el gran don que supuso la vida de Francisco para toda la Iglesia y para todo el mundo", dijo el Papa León durante el vuelo.

En Roma, el aniversario de la muerte del Papa Francisco se conmemora con una Misa programada a celebrarse en la Basílica de Santa María la Mayor, lugar de descanso eterno del difunto Papa.

El Papa León reflexionó sobre el legado de su predecesor en el vuelo papal hacia Guinea Ecuatorial, el último país africano en el viaje apostólico de 11 días

del Papa por el continente.

Tras su homenaje, el Papa respondió a tres preguntas de periodistas angoleños sobre su experiencia en su país.

El Papa León dijo que era "una alegría ver los lugares del mundo donde la Iglesia está creciendo", señalando que no es el caso en otras partes del mundo, y subrayó que esto es "una llamada a la evangelización, a seguir anunciando el Evangelio y a intentar invitar a otros, no con fines proselitistas --como decía tantas veces el Papa Francisco--, sino mediante la belleza y el atractivo de la fe".

"La alegría de los creyentes es uno de los mejores anuncios de la fe, del Evangelio", añadió.

Al ser preguntado sobre la posibilidad de nuevos nombramientos de cardenales africanos, el Papa León dijo que "esta es una pregunta que muchos quieren hacer", señalando que "aún no se ha decidido cuándo habrá un nuevo nombramiento de cardenales".

"Hay que analizar la cuestión a nivel global", afirmó. "Esperamos que, para África y quizá también para Angola en el futuro --no digo en un futuro próximo, sino un poco más lejano--, se pueda considerar el nombramiento de un nuevo cardenal. También para Angola".

Hablando a unos 30.000 pies de altura, el Papa también felicitó por su cumpleaños a dos periodistas que viajaban en el avión como parte de la prensa vaticana. Durante el viaje papal a cuatro países de África, el Papa León ha estado

demostrando sus habilidades lingüísticas, celebrando misas y pronunciando discursos en francés, inglés y portugués. En cada vuelo hacia un nuevo país, el Papa León ha hablado con los periodistas a bordo del avión papal en inglés o en italiano.

En su destino final, el Papa añadirá otro idioma a esa lista, ya que Guinea Ecuatorial es el único país de habla hispana de África.

La visita del Papa León a Guinea Ecuatorial, del 21 al 23 de abril, será solo la segunda visita papal al país; la primera fue la de San Juan Pablo II en 1982.

La visita papal coincide con el 170.º aniversario de la evangelización del país, donde aproximadamente el 75% de los 1,67 millones de habitantes es católico.

En Guinea Ecuatorial, el Papa León hará una parada en un hospital psiquiátrico de la capital, Malabo, visitará una prisión en Bata y rezará en un memorial dedicado a las víctimas de la explosión de una base militar en 2021 que causó la muerte de más de 100 personas. Se espera que la Misa Papal que se celebrará en Mongomo, en la Basílica de la Inmaculada Concepción, reúna a 100.000 católicos. La hermana Francine Hien, de las Hermanas Misioneras de María Inmaculada, declaró a OSV News que este país de mayoría cristiana esperaba la llegada del Papa con "entusiasmo, expectación, fervor y alegría".

(Courtney Mares es editora del Vaticano para OSV News.)

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8:30 WVNS FOX 59	Beckley-Bluefield-Oak Hill (Lewisburg)
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