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Roanoke volunteers feed hungry during pandemic



Volunteers from Our Lady of Nazareth Parish, from left, Maggie Bradley, Colleen Hernandez, Catherine Black and Pat Oberlin make spaghetti and tossed salad for those in need at Roanoke Area Ministries (RAM) House on Tuesday, Nov. 24. Since the pandemic closed the organization's dining room, several volunteers from the parish cook and serve about 80 hot meals to go every day. (Photo/Karen Adams)

Our Lady of Nazareth parishioners 'lifesavers'

KAREN ADAMS

Special to The Catholic Virginian

"Do you love me? Feed my sheep." – John 21:17

When the growing pandemic caused widespread shutdowns in March, Roanoke Area Ministries (RAM) House staff members feared for the hungry people they feed every day of the year.

"We said, 'Where will all these people go and how will they be fed?'" said Geralynn Trellue, the development director and volunteer manager for RAM House, an inter-faith, non-profit day shelter that serves free hot meals daily to anyone in need in downtown Roanoke.

On average, it serves about 80 meals a day; last year it served a total of 30,293 meals to 1,569 people. The organization offers other services as well, including financial and material assistance.

"In March, everyone began to hear: 'You need to stay home, isolate and wash your hands,' but what if you don't have a home? And how do you wash your hands without access to clean water?" Trellue asked, and noted that some RAM House guests are homeless, while others may have a place to stay but not enough to eat.

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Bishops: Getting COVID-19 vaccine 'act of charity'

JULIE ASHER
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The "gravity" of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and "the lack of availability of alternative vaccines," are "sufficiently serious" reasons to accept the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines, the chairmen of the U.S. bishops' doctrine and pro-life committees said Dec. 14.

"Receiving the COVID-19 vaccine ought to be understood as an act of charity toward the other members of our community," they said. "In this way, being vaccinated safely against COVID-19 should be considered an act of love of our neighbor and part of our moral responsibility for the common good."

The bishops addressed the moral concerns raised by the fact

the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines have some connection to cell lines that originated with tissue taken from abortions.

However, this connection to morally compromised cell lines is so remote and the public health situation is too grave to reject the vaccines, said Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Indiana, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Doctrine, and Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Kansas City, Kansas, chairman of the USCCB's Committee on Pro-Life Activities.

On Dec. 8, The Lancet medical journal reported that four clinical trials of a third vaccine, being developed by the University of Oxford and AstraZeneca "appears to have moderate efficacy in preventing

symptomatic illness, and may significantly reduce hospitalization from the disease." AstraZeneca is expected to apply to the FDA for emergency use of its vaccine in the coming weeks.

Bishop Rhoades and Archbishop Naumann said they found the AstraZeneca vaccine to be "more morally compromised" and concluded this vaccine "should be avoided" if there are alternatives available.

"It may turn out, however, that one does not really have a choice of vaccine, at least, not without a lengthy delay in immunization that may have serious consequences for one's health and the health of others," the two prelates stated. "In such a case ... it would be permissible to accept the AstraZeneca vaccine."

Catholic moral teaching

Shortly after Pfizer and Moderna announced Nov. 11 and Nov. 16, respectively, that their vaccines were 95% effective against COVID-19, critics claimed the vaccines have been produced using cells from aborted fetuses, leading to confusion over "the moral permissibility" of using these vaccines.

Bishop Rhoades and Archbishop Naumann addressed this issue in a Nov. 23 memo to their fellow bishops and addressed it again in their 2,400-word statement Dec. 12. In the memo they noted some were "asserting that if a vaccine is connected in any way with tainted cell lines, then it is immoral to be vaccinated with them. This is an inaccurate portrayal of Catholic moral teaching."

In their new statement, the two

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Catechists essential for building up Body of Christ



CHRIST OUR HOPE
MOST REV. BARRY C. KNESTOUT

While the pandemic has presented challenges for how we worship, the extent of our sacramental outreach, attending diocesan and parish events, and much more, it has also presented us with opportunities to employ new ways of serving and communicating within our faith community.

Among those opportunities is our use of technology. Since the first weeks of the pandemic and shutdowns, many parishes have livestreamed Masses to the homebound. Those who otherwise could not attend meetings of parish ministries now do so via Zoom. With the aid of technology, leaders are able to hold question and answer sessions with parishioners without the necessity of gathering in person.

In August, after months of development that pre-dated the onset of COVID-19, our diocesan Office of Christian Formation launched *Pathways: Delivered*, an online program whose content provides training for catechists. (A story about the program can be found at <https://catholicvirginian.org/news/local/diocese-launches-new-pathways-for-catechists/>.)

Catechists are not merely volunteers. They

are people steeped in their faith who have answered a vocational call from God to work in collaboration with me and parish pastors in providing faith formation of children, RCIA, youth ministry and adult education. Because faith formation is an enormous responsibility, catechists themselves must be formed in and knowledgeable about our Catholic faith. This requires a commitment to continuing education.

Pathways: Delivered provides that education. Through a process that has been thoroughly and professionally developed, the program equips catechists with the tools and information they need to provide the best formation to those they teach.

I would be remiss if I did not mention those who are critical to providing children with “a living encounter of Christ” — their parents. The “Directory for Catechesis” states: “Believing parents, with their daily example of life, have the most effective capacity to transmit the beauty of the Christian faith to their children.”

Catechesis of children is most effective when it is a cooperative commitment undertaken by parish catechists and by parents who are active in their children’s faith formation. It begins at home by word and example and is supplemented by the formal teaching provided in religious education programs. Faith formation of children is not something that parents can fully delegate;

it must be an integral part of family life.

If you are a catechist, and you have not yet enrolled in *Pathways: Delivered*, please contact your pastor and begin benefiting from what it has to offer. I am grateful that you have answered the call to catechize people in your parish and to provide them with what the “Directory for Catechesis,” approved by Pope Francis last March and published in June, calls “a living encounter with Christ.”

For anyone who is not a catechist, I invite you to consider exploring *Pathways: Delivered*. From my experience as a pastor, I know that it is possible that you are being called to this ministry but aren’t sure how to respond. The first part of *Pathways* focuses on the vocation of the catechist and includes a “spiritual gift inventory” that will help you in your discernment. Even if you discover that your gifts don’t lend themselves to becoming a catechist, you may learn from the inventory where your gifts might be better suited for serving your parish.

As parishes and individually, please pray for our catechists and all who are involved in faith formation. They are essential in our call to evangelize and to build up the Body of Christ.

Editor’s note: Further information about Pathways: Delivered is available by contacting Megan Cottam at mcottam@richmonddiocese.org.

BISHOP JAMES GIBBONS

1820 **TIME CAPSULE** 2020

A BESTSELLER WRITTEN IN RICHMOND

Throughout the Catholic Diocese of Richmond’s bicentennial year, a time capsule recalling a particular time in diocesan history is scheduled to be published in each issue of The Catholic Virginian. The bicentennial time capsules have been researched and compiled by Father Anthony E. Marques, chair of the Catholic Diocese of Richmond’s Bicentennial Task Force.

A room off the vestibule of the Pro-Cathedral of St. Peter — the first cathedral of the Diocese of Richmond — contains an imposing oak desk that belonged to James Gibbons, the fourth bishop of Richmond (1872–1877).

It was likely on that desk that Bishop Gibbons wrote “Faith of Our Fathers,” a best-selling explanation of the Catholic faith published in December 1876. The work earned Gibbons national acclaim and helped him become one of the best-known and most influential churchmen of his time.

Gibbons (1834–1921) was born to Irish immigrants in Baltimore. When he was about 5 years old, his father contracted tuberculosis and moved the family to Ireland in the hopes of recovering (1839). After his father died (1847), his mother settled the family in New Orleans (1853).

Gibbons studied for the priesthood at St. Charles College in Ellicott City, Maryland (1855–1857), and then at St. Mary’s Seminary in Baltimore (1857–1861). He was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Baltimore in 1861. Father Gibbons served in two parishes and was a volunteer chaplain at Fort McHenry and Fort Marshall in Baltimore during the Civil War (1861–1865). In 1865, he became secretary to Archbishop Martin



Bishop James Gibbons

Spalding of Baltimore and was tasked with making the preparations for the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore (1866).

The council brought together bishops from across the United States in the aftermath of the Civil War to express and strengthen the unity of the Catholic Church. Among other things, the Second Plenary Council urged bishops to evangelize freed slaves and recommended the establishment of new dioceses, including one for North Carolina. This local Church was to be a vicariate apostolic (missionary diocese), and the council, at the urging of Archbishop Spalding, recommended Gibbons to be its first bishop.

In 1868, Gibbons was ordained a bishop. Just 34 years old, he was called “The Boy Bishop.” Gibbons served as vicar apostolic of North Carolina (1868–1878), governing an expansive territory with few Catholics. He participated in Vatican Council I (1869–1870) — the youngest of 700 bishops in attendance. Vatican I is remembered for having taught that, under certain conditions, the pope could teach infallibly on matters of faith and morals.

Following the death in 1872 of John McGill, the third bishop of Richmond (1850–1872), Gibbons was appointed his successor, while remaining vicar apostolic of North Carolina.

Gibbons spent five years in Richmond (1872–1877). During this time, he initiated the diocese’s outreach to African Americans, although these efforts had limited success. The diocese as a whole grew modestly during his tenure: from 17 to 25 priests, from 15 to 22 churches, from 15 to 24 chapels, and from 14 to 24 schools. The Catholic population remained about 17,000 — 7% of the population.

Gibbons was appointed coadjutor of the Archdiocese of Baltimore in 1877, meaning that he would automatically become its archbishop when the incumbent archbishop died. Soon after he was notified of his appointment, his predecessor died, and Gibbons assumed leadership of the archdiocese.

In Baltimore (1877–1921), Gibbons was made the second cardinal (1886) of the United States and became a national figure. Throughout his life, he strove to demonstrate one could be a devout Catholic and a patriotic American — a proposition

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'Creating disciples of Christ' for 50 years in Portsmouth

School seeking to raise \$217K in order to remain open

JENNIFER NEVILLE

Special to The Catholic Virginian

Portsmouth Catholic Regional School (PCRS) is a happy place.

Just walk through the halls adorned with students' paper crafts — trees, angels and wreaths — hanging on the walls. Some artwork has notes such as examples of random acts of kindness that would cause the Grinch's heart to grow.

Visit a music class and watch the pupils play percussion instruments and move to the music.

Peek into the classrooms of primary grades, and perhaps you will see children working on projects entailing painting, coloring or sculpting with Play-Doh.

While all students wear face masks, one can see the smiles in their eyes, said Donna Henry, assistant principal and first-grade teacher.

For 50 years, PCRS has "provided academic excellence" and striven to form children spiritually and socially and to shape them as disciples of Christ, said Scott Bolton, principal since January 2019.

The school educates children from pre-K-3 to eighth grade. In addition to traditional academic studies, students have physical education, Spanish, music and art. Each grade has a religion class, and the students go to Mass weekly and pray together daily. Teachers weave faith into their curricula, Bolton said.

Family feeling

Many say that the PCRS community of staff, families and students are close knit.

"There is this incredible sense of belonging in the community, and it just truly is family," said Henry, who has taught at the school for 35 years.

"People choose to send their kids to PCRS just because of the feeling they get when they walk in there," said Kathy Noblin, PCRS alumna and second-grade teacher for 36 years.

That was true for Mike and Kelley Bright. Before they enrolled their son, Beau, in kindergarten last year, they toured the school. Kelley, who attended PCRS from first to eighth grade in the 1990s, said when she visited, she "instantly had the feeling that it was home."

Similarly, when Mike saw the classrooms, technology lab and "the genuine love and care the teachers displayed for their students," he was hooked.

"I knew right then and there that's where I wanted to send my kids," he said. "It's just a loving,



Beau Bright, a first grader at Portsmouth Regional Catholic School, works with Play-Doh during a hands-on activity on Tuesday, Dec. 8. Celebrating its 50th anniversary, the school is trying to raise \$217,000 in order to remain open. (Photo/Jennifer Neville)

nurturing place with a fantastic world-class, faith-based education."

They enrolled their son the next day, and this year they enrolled their daughter, Penny, in kindergarten.

Beau said he likes the school because "everyone is kind," and he likes learning about Jesus.

"I learned that if you are kind, it makes you a better person," he said.

Focus on faith, service, knowledge

The school emphasizes the spiritual and corporal works of mercy and provides opportunities for students to put those values into action.

In previous years, PCRS has participated in service projects such as collecting food and clothing for the poor, raising money for Habitat for Humanity, singing carols at nursing homes and making cards for the sick. They are currently collecting baby items for Catholic Charities.

Generations have gone to Catholic schools in Portsmouth starting in 1876 when St. Joseph Academy opened. Through the years, Portsmouth Catholic high schools consolidated, with the last one closing in 1991.

In 1970, the three Catholic elementary schools in the city — St. Paul's, Holy Angels and Little Flower — consolidated to form what is now Portsmouth Catholic Regional School. Along with lay teachers, the Daughters of Charity continued to staff the school until 2000. When the religious order left, the school was staffed entirely by lay teachers.

The school has had some physical changes —

the addition of primary and middle school wings, a gym and a technology lab — but has remained steadfast in its cornerstone of faith, service and knowledge, Henry said.

Henry, who attended PCRS for seventh grade in 1970, said she patterned her teaching approach after that of her English teacher whose classes provided the opportunity "for more student choice, interaction, discussion and debate." The religious sister set up learning stations that re-enforced lessons through activities such as crossword puzzles, games and cooperative learning like developing skits.

Raising funds to continue operating

At a time when many businesses and individuals are experiencing financial hardship, PCRS is facing its own financial strife, which has put the school's continued operation in jeopardy.

The Diocese of Richmond is requiring the school to raise \$217,000 by Jan. 27, 2021 to cover a budget shortfall this year, or the school will close at the end of the academic year.

Within just three months, the school community rallied together and raised 92% of the funds, partially through a golf tournament and Giving Tuesday, a national day of giving. A number of alumni, community leaders and local businesses have contributed, and tickets for a raffle are on sale. The school is raising its awareness through communication, media and social media.

As of Friday, Dec. 18, the school had raised more than \$200,000.

If the school meets the \$217,000 goal for this year, Bright hopes donations will continue so the school "can get a jump start" on next year's budget. However, he said the school needs to find additional ways to keep it sustainable. For that, enrollment is key, said Mike Bright.

One challenge to increasing enrollment is that classes are currently limited to 15 students due to COVID restrictions. Pre-COVID, there was room for 22 to 25 students in each class, but few had that many, Bolton said. The school has 143 students with one class for each grade — except sixth and eighth grades, which each added another class this year due to their size. Pre-K through second grade are full.

Bolton said staff is "dedicated" and "go above and beyond," and school board member Cynthia Pauler said the teachers "go the extra mile."

"There's just a genuine care for these students by teachers and staff," Bolton said. "Everyone has a common goal to create disciples of Jesus Christ within the students."

Donations may be made at portsmouthcatholic.net and to the [McMahon Parater Scholarship Foundation](https://membership.faithdirect.net/givenow/). <https://membership.faithdirect.net/givenow/> VA1016

No diocesan buses to March for Life

In a Wednesday, Dec. 9, letter to priests, deacons religious and lay leaders, Bishop Barry C. Knestout announced that due to COVID-19, parishes and diocesan-sponsored groups will not be organizing trips to the March for Life in Washington via chartered buses.

"The reality of the pandemic has made this mode of transportation prohibitive for this year," the bishop wrote.

However, Bishop Knestout invited the faithful to participate in local initiatives being organized by the diocese's Center for Marriage, Family and Life "so that we may come together in both prayer and action to defend the right to life."

The invitation included participation in a livestreamed Mass that he will celebrate from the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart at 7 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 28.

"The Mass will be offered for the specific

intention of a greater respect for all life and for an end to abortion," the bishop wrote.

Regarding Friday, Jan. 29, the day of the March for Life, Bishop Knestout wrote, "I encourage each parish, school and campus ministry of the diocese to offer a Mass for the Respect Life movement, as well as engage in an act of advocacy to help advance an end to abortion."

The Center for Marriage, Family and Life (<https://www.cdrcmfl.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2020-12-10-2021-March-for-Life-Activities.pdf>)

will provide pro-life programming for youth groups, campus ministries and Catholic schools.

"While it is disappointing that we adjust our previous March for Life efforts, I hope that our efforts this year can sustain the movement and that we can continue to be a powerful witness to life," Bishop Knestout wrote.

Forum on racism an 'eye opener' at Ascension Parish

Series challenges attendees to remedy social justice issues

JENNIFER NEVILLE

Special to The Catholic Virginian

At a time of heightened racial tension, a forum at Church of Ascension, Virginia Beach, has started transforming hearts.

The two-night forum "Understand and Overcome Racism" in August and September enlightened the approximately 100 virtual and physical attendees about overt and subtle racism, both systemic and individual. It also called for action.

"We felt that it was very important that our parishioners reflect on the current events of the day with the Black Lives Matter and all the police brutality issues that were occurring," said Ruth Brogan, parish director of social justice ministry.

While the forum opened a dialogue on racism, Alvin Schexnider, a parishioner at the Basilica of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Norfolk, and facilitator on the first night, said there's still "a lot of work to be done."

"It can't begin and end with one forum. There needs to be serious conversation, an ongoing dialogue about racism in the Catholic Church," he said.

The event was one of the parish's four forums that educated people on social justice concerns and challenged attendees to remedy the issues. Previous forums addressed

breaking the cycle of prejudice, human trafficking and homelessness. Another on the death penalty is slated for January.

During the forum, Deacon Williams described ways the Catholic Church has been complicit, and Schexnider, who has a doctorate in political science, told The Catholic Virginian that the Trump administration has perpetuated racism by his "divisive" stance on race, gender and immigration.

"We have to slowly work our way through this issue because in my opinion, the 'in-your-face response' can be counterproductive and will lead to some backlash," said parishioner Ed Hobbs, who shared his story of prejudice at the forum. "Not every incident that involves people of color is necessarily racist."

Deacon Williams shared his experience of prejudice in the 1960s when he was one of two Black students during his freshman year at Benedictine High School and one of four Black students by his senior year.

In his sophomore year, he celebrated with fellow school athletes at the annual spring picnic at a local clubhouse. When it "became time to swim," the clubhouse manager said Deacon Williams was not allowed because of his color. He

and his fellow athletes left the clubhouse in solidarity.

"Because of that manager's prejudice, everyone on the team's day was ruined," he said. "I felt the bitter sting of racism that every Black person in this country will experience at some point in their lives."

Several of those involved in the forum said many people don't know the gravity of racism in the United States, and some don't believe it even exists.

The video "Holy Post: Race in America" by Phil Vischer, shown during the forum, detailed the history of systemic racism from post-Civil War to today. The video, available on YouTube, said that Black individuals have 60% of the earnings of white people but only one-tenth of the wealth.

He put partial blame on a history of racist legislation, segregation, difficulty getting federally-backed mortgages, the inequity of the GI Bill and the movement of factories to the suburbs, some of which prohibited Black individuals to live there.

Vischer said in 1970, 70% of Black men had good, blue-collar jobs. By 1987, that dropped to 28%. Also, Black individuals are incarcerated at such a high rate that one in four Black boys born today will go to jail at some point in his life. In comparison, one in 23 white boys will share that fate.

Father Daniel Malingumu, Ascension pastor, said people have told him that the forum was "an eye opener," and Deacon Charles Williams, director of the Diocese of Richmond's Office for Black Cath-

olics, said many attendees were "unaware" and "shocked" to hear the information.

"We see we are all from the same mission and all called to be sons and daughters of God no matter who you are," Father Malingumu said.

Forum attendees brainstormed ways to address the issue of racism. Some called for additional forums and "listening" events during which Black individuals share their experiences of prejudice. They suggested inviting Deacon Williams to give a homily at their parishes and proposed the diocese dedicate a weekend in which the homilies at all parishes address racism.

They recommended reconciliation services on racism and making prayer cards on the issue available. They directed people to look inwardly to examine their prejudices, make an effort to meet people of color and reach out to other local churches and groups to work together.

The racism forum has already spurred a book club and the educational Just Faith module.

Deacon Williams said he is hopeful that eradicating racism can be accomplished.

"You could see emotion and feel something was moving in them by the questions they asked and the way they asked them," he said. "I'm encouraged that one day we will have the beloved community that we all want."

Editor's note: Deacon Williams' presentation at the forum can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjICG5pXK9g>.

Your legacy is every life you ever touched.

Maya Angelou



What will be your legacy?

Your legacy will brighten the future of the Church.

Your legacy will reflect what is important to you.

Your legacy will inspire others.

What actions do you need to take to create your legacy?

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Accuser recants allegations against Father William Dinga Jr.

The Catholic Diocese of Richmond announced Tuesday, Dec. 15, that an individual who previously came forward and accused a retired diocesan priest of child sexual abuse has recanted the accusations. The allegations were made earlier this year against Father William Dinga Jr.

This recantation by the alleged victim exonerates Father Dinga of these accusations. The priest adamantly denied and maintained his innocence concerning the allegations, which arose from alleged conduct at Christ the King Catholic Church, Norfolk, in 1986, when they were brought to the attention

of the diocese.

Just as the diocese strives to remain transparent when child sexual abuse allegations are brought forward, the diocese will also publicly clear the accused of any wrongdoing when an accused is subjected to mistaken or unsupported allegations.

Father Dinga, who obtained a medical retirement in 1990, was ordained a priest of the Catholic Diocese of Richmond in 1975. As a result of his exoneration of these charges, the diocese has restored him to the previous position and status he held with the diocese prior to the now recanted allegations.

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Inspiration.

Bishops' committee sets standards for evaluating hymns

GREG ERLANDSON
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Expressing concern for the doctrinal soundness of some of the lyrics of Catholic hymns now available for use in Catholic liturgies, the U.S. bishops' doctrine committee in a forthcoming report suggests guidelines for bishops in evaluating hymn lyrics and for selecting hymnals being considered for use in churches.

An accompanying memo said the document is to "assist bishops in their oversight of liturgical celebrations in their dioceses and in the granting of the imprimatur."

It also encouraged bishops to "share this resource with composers and hymn publishers in their dioceses" as well as "diocesan worship officers, pastors and parish musicians." It also said that the doctrine committee "is available for any bishop who desires assistance in the evaluation of hymns or hymnals."

Areas of concern

The committee document identified six areas of particular concern, a principal one being the treatment of the Eucharist. It warned that "a steady diet" of doctrinally deficient hymns "would erode Catholic sensibility regarding the fullness of Eucharist teaching, on the Mass as sacrifice and eventually on the Church, as formed by that sacrifice."

The document, titled "Catholic Hymnody at the Service of the Church: An Aid for Evaluating Hymn Lyrics," was produced by the Committee on Doctrine of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

A copy of the report and memo were obtained by Catholic News Service.

The report, which followed the committee's reading of approximately 1,000 hymns composed and published mostly in the period 1980-2015, acknowledged several areas of doctrinal deficiency in some contemporary hymns and suggests two guidelines in "determining whether a hymn is doctrinally suitable for liturgical use":

— "Is the hymn in conformity with Catholic doctrine?"

— "Is the hymn expressed in image and vocabulary appropriately reflective of the usage of Scripture and the public liturgical prayer of the Church?"

The report focused on six key deficiencies in some current hymns: the presentation of eucha-

"It is our hope that this guidance will help ensure that all the sacred music employed in liturgical celebrations will achieve its purpose, which is the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful."

- U.S. BISHOPS' DOCTRINE COMMITTEE

ristic doctrine; the presentation of Trinitarian doctrine; deficiencies in the doctrine of God and his relation to humans; "hymns with a view of the Church that sees her as essentially a human construction"; "hymns with doctrinally incorrect views of the Jewish people"; and "hymns with incorrect Christian anthropology."

In a memo accompanying the document, the committee said its report is modeled on a 1997 report by Indianapolis Archbishop Daniel M. Buechlein on "Ten Common Deficiencies in Catechetical Materials."

Archbishop Buechlein's report prompted a long-running and wide-ranging review of catechetical materials used in religious education. The bishops' Subcommittee on the Catechism met annually with religious publishers and set up an exhaustive voluntary review process to determine if texts were in conformity with the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Need for 'doctrinal integrity'

The memo accompanying the hymnal document acknowledged "over the years concerns have been raised regarding the lyrics of hymns and songs used in the liturgy that may be misleading or lacking in substance."

"Given the power of music to reinforce the

words that are sung by the people, great care must be taken to ensure the doctrinal integrity of the lyrics," it said.

The first and lengthiest area of concern in the document focused on the presentation of eucharistic doctrine, reflecting a growing urgency among the bishops to address deficiencies in how some Catholics understand the Eucharist.

A 2019 survey by the Pew Research Center found that only about half of those surveyed correctly understood that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ in the Mass, while half of respondents thought of the bread and wine as merely symbols of the body and blood of Christ.

The document said language that implies the bread and wine remain bread and wine after the consecration should be avoided, as should language that implies that the bread and wine "are merely symbols of another reality or person."

'Reluctance to use "Father"'

The document cited examples of current hymnody that fail to make the distinctions required.

The concern, the bishops said, is that "Catholics nurtured on a steady diet of certain hymns will learn from them that at Mass we come together to share bread and wine, which remain bread and wine, a common meal, even if under special circumstances."

Further, "these hymns correspondingly also downplay or eliminate entirely reference to the sacrifice of Christ, his priesthood, and his status as both priest and victim, as well as to the role of the ministerial priesthood in the Church."

Regarding the doctrine of the Trinity, the report criticized hymns where there appeared to be a "reluctance to use the word 'Father.'" Sometimes the word "Creator" is substituted for Father, although it applies to all three persons of the Trinity, and may imply that the Son and the Spirit are not God. "This is (the heresy of) Arianism, however unintentionally," the report concluded.

The document concluded with an exhortation that "sacred song united to the words ... forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy."

"It is our hope," added the bishops, "that this guidance will help ensure that all the sacred music employed in liturgical celebrations will achieve its purpose, which is the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful."

Christmas is sign of God's preferential love for the poor, cardinal says

CINDY WOODEN
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Reaching out to and helping the poor "is to imitate God; it is to make oneself small out of love in order to raise up the other," the preacher of the papal household told Pope Francis, officials of the Roman Curia and Vatican employees.

The Bible says that there was no room in the inn for Mary and Joseph when Jesus was about to be born, Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa noted. "Today as well there is no room in the inn for the poor of the world. But history has shown us what side God is on and what side the church must be on."

Offering his third Advent meditation for the pope and his collab-

orators Dec. 18, Cardinal Cantalamessa quoted Jean Guittou, the French philosopher and lay observer at the Second Vatican Council, who said the bishops there "rediscovered the 'sacrament of poverty,' the presence of Christ under the species of those who suffer."

"These are strong words, but they are well-founded theologically," the cardinal said. Christ became human, but resembles most especially people who are "poor, humble or suffering. Christ instituted this sign just as he instituted the Eucharist. The one who said, 'This is my body,' said the same words about the poor" when he taught that whatever people do for the least of their brothers and sisters, they do for Christ.

In coining the phrase "the church of the poor," he said, St. John XXIII was not talking just about the poor people who are members of the church; "in a certain sense, all the poor of the world — whether they are baptized or not — belong to the church."

Cardinal Cantalamessa said some people might object, "but they don't have faith and are not baptized." This is true. But neither did the Holy Innocents — the babies in and around Bethlehem who King Herod ordered murdered — who the Catholic Church honors with a feast day Dec. 28.

"Fortunately for us, God has many more ways to save us than we can imagine," he said. "Although all of these ways — none excluded

— in a manner known only to God pass through Christ and his paschal mystery."

"The poor belong to Christ not because they say so," the cardinal said, "but because Christ said they do."

One consequence, Cardinal Cantalamessa said, is that "the pope, and the other pastors of the church with him, truly is the father of the poor. And it's a joy, an example for all of us to see how this role has been taken to heart by the most recent popes and in a particular way, if I can say so, by the pastor who sits on the chair of Peter today."

"Christmas is the feast of the humility of God," he said. When

See Poor, Page 12

Bible offers encouragement during time of restrictions

Perspective, like beauty, often is in the beholder's eyes. I understand the frustration expressed by two of the letter writers regarding the right to worship (Catholic Virginian, Nov. 30).

My perspective is different. I view the current limitations as an expression of love for each other, not a violation of the First Amendment. This amendment prohibits Congress from making any law "...respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

Our diocese's website notes, "Most parishes are open on a normal schedule for private prayer, individual meetings for pastoral care and reconciliation with a priest, some gatherings and meetings, and social ministry efforts with restrictions." To help protect me and others, one of these restrictions is a limited number of people in church at one time.

In first grade, Sisters of Mercy taught me our Church is not a building, but people. I pray whenever I want and wherever I want. I long for greater human interaction within a sanctuary, at work and in restaurants. I am confident my prayers will be answered soon.

Meanwhile, I continue to pray for patience and the ability to empathize with those whose perspectives are different than mine. One of the great things about the Bible is its ability to offer encouragement.

As I search for assistance in how to live with these restrictions, Romans 13:1-2 helps guide me: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment."

– Timothy A. McDermott
Ashland

Grateful to be safe at Mass

I am a 60-something Catholic woman whose husband has risk factors for a case of COVID-19 being severe for him. I could choose to take some risks for myself, but I must not take risks that endanger him or others. So I listen to the medical experts,

realizing that they are not perfect but certainly more knowledgeable than I am. I thank Bishop Knestout and his staff and Fr. Tony Yllana and those at the Church of the Good Shepherd, Smithfield, for keeping me safe when I attend Mass.

Some have questioned why the Catholic Church has not challenged COVID restrictions on religious services. I suspect that Bishop Knestout follows state and federal guidelines out of concern for the welfare of his flock.

At first, medical and government personnel took strong, painful measures. Since then, with more understanding of the virus transmission, they have eased restrictions and I am grateful to attend Mass and receive Communion again. I and my fellow parishioners wear masks, refrain from singing and remain 6 feet apart out of concern and love for each other.

Many are unhappy about receiving the host in their hands. I respect the reverence and tradition of reception on the tongue. Those who are uncomfortable with reception in the hand perhaps can take comfort in St. Cyril of Jerusalem's words: "Make your left hand a throne for the right, as for that which is to receive a King. And having hollowed your palm, receive the Body of Christ, saying over it, Amen."

Reverence and belief in the Real Presence is essential, however we receive it.

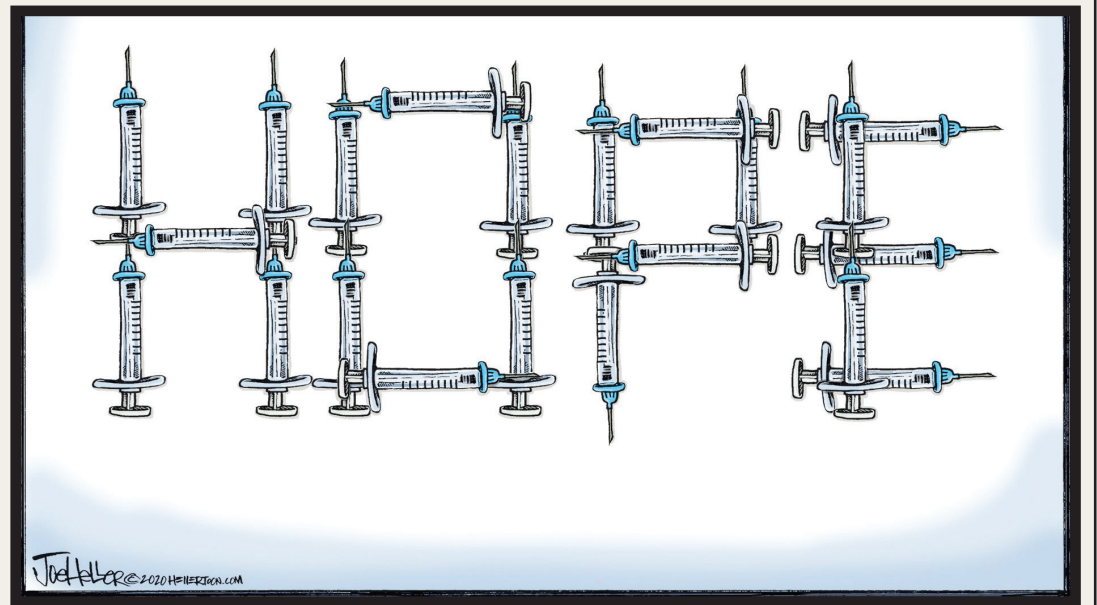
– Mary McCaskill
Carrollton

See COVID as a respect life issue

As the number of daily COVID deaths is now well above the daily average number of abortions in the U.S., I am still exceedingly puzzled why COVID deaths are not treated as a respect-for-life issue and vigorously discussed and criticized by the Church in the same terms.

COVID victims are innocent people. The most likely to die are the weak (the elderly), the afflicted (those predisposed to illness) and the poor (who lack access to medical care of the rich). These are all groups with whom Jesus most closely identified.

The 3,000 people who died from COVID on Dec. 10, 2020, are more than who died during the September 11 terrorist attacks. COVID deaths, like abortions, are a direct



consequence of government inaction and a general public largely unwilling to accept any restrictions, e.g., mask wearing, on their supposed "freedom."

It appears the Church has even forgotten the fundamental Catholic distinctions between true freedom and license. These are succinctly defined online at the Catholic Education Resource Center: "freedom embraces responsibility and is guided by reason and virtue; license is choice without restraint." We learned a more compelling definition in my Catholic high school: freedom is the ability to do what is morally right for the benefit of others.

The U.S. is a society where license is rampant in almost all personal activity and where one's supposed "freedom" often comes at a cost to others. In the COVID case, as in abortion, that cost is the life of another.

– Dr. Martin G. Mlynczak
Yorktown

Take faith more seriously

In his letter (Catholic Virginian, Nov. 30), Father Louis Benoit calls us to honesty over Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God. "The kingdom of God is at hand: repent, and believe in the gospel."

Do we take our faith seriously? I know that I fail miserably. If I were serious, I would take my family to Mass daily without considering personal cost. Perhaps I would get to know people enough that they would accept an invitation to Mass. However, I try to at least take seriously my responsibility in bringing my children up in the Catholic Church.

I witnessed much of my confirmation class leave for college and not look back. Much of my extended family decided that they did not need the faith before the pan-

demic hit and will likely never come back. How do I gently discipline my children to remain in the Church without their losing heart?

When Church leaders preach inclusivity over repentance, how can I justify any discipline? Shall I teach my children that it's OK to commit politically expedient mortal sins and then receive Jesus because Jesus wouldn't want them to be excluded from heaven or the Eucharist? Shall I tell them that prominently and publicly supporting positions gravely at odds with Church teaching doesn't separate them from Christ?

If it is improper for me, a father, to abdicate my responsibility to raise and discipline my children in the faith, then it is equally improper for our spiritual fathers to do the same. Perhaps we all ought to take our faith and responsibilities more seriously.

– Timothy Olmsted
Farmville

Cardinal should 'veer' on Biden

As a faithful Catholic all my life, I am distressed by your article "How Cardinal Gregory hopes to work with Biden" (Catholic Virginian Nov. 30) in which Cardinal Gregory said "...that for eight years as vice president, Biden went to Mass and received communion. I am not going to veer from that."

It is so hard to understand for many of us who have viewed it as a scandal for more than eight years that a Catholic politician can use his influence in government for 40 years to promote the killing of God's innocent unborn babies.

Canon 915 of the Code of Canon Law states: "Those who have been excommunicated or interdicted after the imposition or declaration of the penalty and others obstinately persevering in manifest grave sin are not to be admitted to holy communion."

If the admonition is lacking, then why has Biden not been admonished yet? Anyone who persists in grave sin, i.e., supporting abortion, needs to be admonished for the safety of his own soul.

St. Paul (1 Cor 11:27-29) calls it "profaning the Body and Blood of the Lord" by unworthy reception. Cardinal Raymond L. Burke says "the Church cannot remain silent and indifferent to a public offense against the Body and Blood of Christ."

It seems that 40 years of public obstinacy in support of abortion should be enough reason for Cardinal Gregory to "veer." Saving the soul of the offender and preventing further public scandal are serious enough reasons for the cardinal to act.

– Mary Nguyen
Virginia Beach

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Shine like Stars

Catholic Diocese of Richmond
1820 Bicentennial 2020

TWELVE

IN THE WORLD

DECEMBER 2020



TIME CAPSULE

Continued from Page 2

that was sometimes questioned at that time by Catholic authorities in Rome and by non-Catholics in the United States.

Gibbons helped advance his position by writing the above-mentioned book, whose full title was "The Faith of Our Fathers: Being a Plain Exposition and Vindication of the Church Founded by Our Lord Jesus Christ." As he explained in the preface, an excerpt of which appears below, Gibbons sought to explain and defend the Catholic faith.

His book was different from other Catholic apologetic works of the time because it was written in a non-polemical way. This tone surely reflected the historical experience of Catholics in Virginia and in North Carolina — and Gibbons' experience in those places — as a religious minority striving for social acceptance.

Father John Banister Tabb, a priest of the Richmond Diocese and a poet whom Gibbons had earlier received into the Catholic Church (1872), made stylistic contributions to the work. By the time of Gibbons' death, "Faith of Our Fathers" had gone through 93 editions and had been translated into several languages. The book remains in circulation today.

Preface.

The object of this little volume is to present in a plain and practical form an exposition and vindication of the principal tenets of the Catholic Church. It was thought sufficient to devote but a brief space to such Catholic doctrines and practices as are happily admitted by Protestants, while those that are controverted by them are more elaborately elucidated.

The work was compiled by the author during the uncertain hours which he could spare from the more active duties of the ministry. It substantially embodies the instructions and discourses delivered by him before mixed congregations in Virginia and North Carolina. ...

As his chief aim has been to bring home the truths of the Catholic faith to our separated brethren, who generally accept the Scripture as the only source of authority in religious matters, he has endeavored to fortify his statements by abundant reference to the sacred text. He has thought proper, however, to add frequent quotations from the early Fathers [of the Church], whose testimony, at least as witnesses of the faith of their times, must be accepted even by those who call in question their personal authority. ...

RICHMOND, November 21st, 1876.

Throughout the Catholic Diocese of Richmond's bicentennial year, *The Catholic Virginian* will publish the history of the diocese in the *Shine Like Stars in the World* section that will appear in the last issue of each month. The content of this section is provided by the Bicentennial Task Force.

FATHER ANTHONY E. MARQUES
Chair, Catholic Diocese of Richmond
Bicentennial Task Force

Branching Out Toward Modernity: World War II, Vatican II and Beyond (1935–2019)

The Diocese of Richmond changed significantly as a result of World War II (1939–1945). In Virginia, as throughout the country, there was a population explosion followed by social upheavals as the "baby boomer" generation came of age.

Around the same time, a momentous event brought change within the Church: the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). The implementation of Vatican II took place amid the convulsion of Western society and became intertwined with the sense of optimism, the eagerness to break with the past and the realization of personal autonomy that characterized a stormy decade (ca. 1963–ca. 1974).

A key result of these trends was that the Catholic Church in Richmond, as in the rest of the United States, faced an increasingly secular culture in the second half of the 20th century. At the beginning of the new millennium, a crisis emerged: the scandal of clerical abuse (2002–2019).

Bishop Francis X. DiLorenzo: Restructuring and New Initiatives (2004–2017)

Francis X. DiLorenzo (1942–2017) of Philadelphia was named the 12th bishop of Richmond in 2004. A priest of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, DiLorenzo had been an auxiliary bishop in Scranton and then bishop of Honolulu.

During his tenure in Richmond, the diocese found new ways to meet persistent and evolving challenges such as the shortage of priests and declining religious practice. After reaching 75, the usual retirement age for a bishop, DiLorenzo continued to lead the diocese until his unexpected death (2017).

In response to the aging of priests and scant ordinations in previous decades (ca. 1980–ca. 2005), the diocese began to recruit more seminarians, an effort that yielded a modest increase of priests. But with retirements outstripping ordinations, more priests were needed.



Bishop Francis X. DiLorenzo, seated, is pictured with the permanent deacons following their ordination on Oct. 19, 2013. He also ordained permanent deacons in 2012 and 2015.

(Diocese of Richmond Archives photo)

values. For example, the Supreme Court legal-

ized same-sex marriage (2015) less than a decade after Virginia adopted an amendment to the state constitution outlawing the practice (2007). The Dioceses of Richmond and Arlington had strongly supported this measure as part of the referendum.

In another trend, more Americans, particularly those belonging to the "millennial" generation (born ca. 1982–ca. 2004), were affiliating with no organized religion while often still seeking spiritual experience.

In response to these trends, the diocese reorganized its staff to form an Office for Evangelization (2011), which encompassed ministry to young people (ages 12–17), college students (ages 18–22), and young adults (ages 18–30). This decision reflected an awareness of the 68 universities and colleges within the territory of the diocese. Faced with a changing religious landscape, parishes and campus ministries made greater efforts to reach non-practicing Catholics and to bolster the commitment of those already in the pews.

These were stirrings of the "New Evangelization," Pope St. John Paul II's initiative (1983) to rouse the growing numbers of inactive members of the Church in historically Catholic areas (namely, the Americas and Western Europe).

By way of background, Vatican II (1962–1965) and Pope Paul VI (1963–1978) had recognized the change in religious attitudes. More recently, John Paul II's successors have renewed his call for large-scale evangelization efforts within the Church.

The newness of this project entailed a paradigm shift in Catholic practice: the full involvement of the laity, emphasis on dialogue and mercy rather than on condemnation, a focus on one's personal relationship with God, giving testimony to one's faith and developing a missionary outlook on ordinary life.

Throughout the history of the Diocese of Richmond, Catholics lived in a missionary territory because they were outnumbered by Protestants. While that disparity continued, Catholics were now a religious minority in another sense: the surrounding culture and population were becoming less religious.

To alleviate the shortage, the Richmond Diocese negotiated agreements with dioceses in Africa, the Philippines and Latin America to bring priests from those places to temporarily staff parishes (2004). These arrangements marked a historic role reversal as some regions supplying priests had once been missionary territories themselves. The clergy of the Diocese of Richmond became more diverse, as eventually 35% of its priests originated from other countries.

Moreover, some priests were assigned to multiple churches as part of several parish "clusters," beginning in 2005. These structures hearkened to an earlier period in the diocese and reflected the longstanding practice in southwest Virginia. Beginning in 2012, Bishop DiLorenzo continued to ordain permanent deacons who provided ministerial support at the parish and diocesan level.

Education and Catholic identity were distinguishing features of DiLorenzo's episcopate. New funding, a systematic outreach to Hispanics (Segura Initiative, 2010), and greater oversight made Catholic schools more affordable, accessible and effective throughout the diocese.

Another initiative, the Lay Ecclesial Ministry Institute (2010) began to train professional men and women for various roles in parishes, schools and campus ministries. DiLorenzo, together with the bishop of Arlington, also established the Virginia Catholic Conference (2004) to advocate for Catholic values in the Virginia General Assembly and with the governor of the commonwealth.

Catholics in the Diocese of Richmond, as in the rest of the United States and other parts of the world, lived in an increasingly secular society. One effect was the continuing ebb in Mass attendance and reception of the sacraments among English-speakers.

Religious practice held steadier in ethnic communities where culture was more closely tied to faith, notably among Hispanics and Filipinos, although even there some erosion was evident.

Beyond the Church, there were signs that American culture was becoming more skeptical of institutional religion and hostile toward its

What it means for us to 'bless the Lord'



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
FATHER KENNETH DOYLE
CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

Q. In the Gloria at Sunday Mass, we say, "We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you." In Psalm 63, we pray, "I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands, calling on your name." And in Psalm 103, we say, "Bless the Lord, my soul; all my being, bless his holy name!" What does it mean for us to "bless the Lord"? How can we do that? (Indiana)

A. Your question makes sense: How can we, who have received all that we have from the Lord, bless God who possesses everything already? And the answer has to do with the Hebrew word for "bless." It has the same root as the word for "kneel," and it really means to "adore" God, to praise him for his magnificence and thank him for his abundant favors.

Psalm 103, for example, whose opening verse you quote, goes on to say: "Bless the Lord, my soul; and do not forget all his gifts, who pardons all your sins, and heals all your ills ... and crowns you with mercy and compassion, who fills your days with good things."

When God blesses us, we are helped and strengthened and made better off than we were; but when we "bless" God, that adds nothing to

God's greatness but simply indicates our wholehearted gratitude for his divine favors.

Q. I understand that the prohibition against eating meat on Friday was lifted with the expectation that we would choose another penitential practice instead. If I don't do an act of sacrifice and still eat meat on Friday, am I committing a sin? (Suffolk)

A. To answer that question, we do best to go back to the statement issued by the bishops of the United States in 1966 when they lifted the mandatory obligation of Friday abstinence. (The Church's law concerning this is a matter that can be determined by each national bishops' conference for Catholics of that region.)

In that 1966 statement, the U.S. bishops said: "Friday should be in each week something of what Lent is in the entire year. For this reason, we urge all to prepare for that weekly Easter that comes with each Sunday by freely making of every Friday a day of self-denial and mortification in prayerful remembrance of the passion of Jesus Christ" (No. 23).

The use of the words "urge" and "freely" seem to me to be clear evidence that the obligation is not one binding under pain of sin. That conviction is further strengthened by a later section of this same document, which says: "We emphasize that our people are henceforth free from the obligation traditionally

binding under pain of sin in what pertains to Friday abstinence" (No. 25).

Despite the lifting of the mandate, a fair number of Catholics continue to abstain from meat on Fridays, and that is surely consistent with the 1966 statement's recommendation:

"Among the works of voluntary self-denial and personal penance which we especially commend to our people for the future observance of Friday, even though we hereby terminate the traditional law of abstinence binding under pain of sin ... we give first place to abstinence from flesh meat. We do so in the hope that the Catholic community will ordinarily continue to abstain from meat by free choice as formerly we did in obedience to Church law" (No. 24).

Among the other ways of voluntary sacrifice recommended by the 1966 statement are "doing volunteer work in hospitals, visiting the sick, serving the needs of the aged and the lonely, instructing the young in the faith" (No. 27).

Q. Some 50 years ago, I converted to the Catholic Church. But one question has always bothered me: Where will I find the word "purgatory" in the Bible? (Elmer City, Washington)

A. This is a question I am often asked. The answer is that you won't find the specific word "purgatory" in the Bible. But the concept

is surely there — the notion of a period of purification after death before one is worthy to enter heaven.

In fact, even before Christ, the Jewish people recognized that there could be such a need and believed that the prayers of those still living could aid in that cleansing. In the Second Book of Maccabees (12:39-46), Judas Maccabeus prays for his fallen comrades who had died in battle while wearing amulets dedicated to pagan idols.

That Old Testament passage tells us that Judas turned to prayer as an expiatory sacrifice and "thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be absolved from their sin" — showing his belief that the deceased could still be helped by the intercession of the living.

In the New Testament, arguably the clearest reference to purgatory comes in Matthew's Gospel (12:32), where Jesus states that "whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come" — implying that there are at least some sins that can be forgiven in the next life.

Such scriptural references lead to the Church's belief, stated in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, that "all who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven" (No. 1030).

(Questions may be sent to askfatherdoyle@gmail.com and 30 Columbia Circle Dr., Albany, New York 12203.)

The appropriate way to handle cremated remains

DEACON ED HANDEL

Special to The Catholic Virginian

The practice of cremation is on the increase for faithful Catholics. This practice was approved by the Church in 1963. While it is an approved method, the Church still prefers a full body burial to cremation. Canon law (1176 #3) states: "[The Church] does not however forbid cremation, unless this is chosen for reasons which are contrary to Christian teaching."

There are specific ways in which we are called to care for the cremated remains of our deceased loved ones. In contrast to how a funeral home handles a traditional burial — where they accompany the body from the time they pick it up to the lid being placed on the vault in the ground or the door being closed on a crypt — the urn or similar container containing the cremated remains can simply be handed to the family, and it leaves their care.

Since at this point the people who control the cremains are the family, guidance from the Church is important.

We are called to reverence our bodies in life and in death, as they are temples of the Holy Spirit. In reverencing them in life and death, we are also confirming our faith in the resurrection of the body on the last day no

matter the state of the body.

We see in the cremated remains of the deceased that the appearance has significantly changed. We need to remember the substance of the cremains does not change; it is still the body of the deceased, and it is to be treated with reverence.

The Church teaches that cremated remains should be buried in a sacred place, such as a cemetery — preferably a Catholic cemetery. Inurnment in a columbarium on a cemetery or Church property is also an option.

Knowing that the substance of the remains has not changed should allow us to understand that we should not separate ashes any more than we would separate off parts of the body. Similarly, in scattering the ashes, we are scattering the body of the deceased.

When the Church teaches that we are not to comingle the cremains of two of our loved ones, it is reminding us that we would never place two bodies in the same casket.

Knowing that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, we know that doing any of the aforementioned actions with the cremains would be desecrating the body of our deceased loved one.

Our reverence for the body also helps us realize why keeping cremains at home, even in

a specially prepared location, does not show that reverence. While it may seem harmless to keep the urn at home, it is actually the opposite. We would never consider keeping a full body in our home, so why would we consider keeping the cremains there?

Coming to terms with the grief of losing a loved one can be difficult. An integral part of the process for expressing that grief is being able to say goodbye to the body — no matter its form. Keeping the cremains in the home prolongs this process for many people, as they cannot come to believe that the person is gone.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is clear in its instruction: We should always treat the cremains of our loved ones with the same love and respect we would if the person had not been cremated.

The Diocese of Richmond's Office of Cemetery and Funeral Services manages a program at cemeteries to accommodate cremains from those who are unable to afford a proper disposition of the cremains. For more information on this option, contact the office at 757-229-0851 or at ehandel@richmonddiocese.org.

Deacon Ed Handel is director of the Diocese of Richmond's Office of Cemetery and Funeral Services

Like the Magi, be guided by light of faith



IN LIGHT OF FAITH
BARBARA HUGHES

As the new year beckons, I'm reminded of a Japanese proverb that cautions: "When standing at a crossroads, choose what you love, for you will live with the consequences."

It's a thought-provoking adage since all day, every day, we're faced with choices. From the clothes we wear and the food we eat to the way we spend our leisure time, the choice is ours. Granted, some choices may seem insignificant, but when we consider that they often lay the ground for acquired habits, they take on a deeper meaning, especially when it comes to formulating New Year's resolutions.

Re-evaluating dietary and exercise habits are perhaps the most common resolutions, though typically the first to fall by the wayside. The reason for the low success rate may have much to do with what's motivating the decision.

When the choice for a healthier lifestyle is motivated less by vanity than by love and respect for our body as a gift from God and a temple of the Holy Spirit, our decision takes on a spiritual dimension that affects not only the health of our body, but the health of our soul.

Every choice, every decision, has a spiritual component, and sooner or later we will live with the consequences. Like any act that requires self-discipline, resolve is strengthened through practice. It doesn't matter whether our resolve concerns diet, exercise or the practice of prayer and good works. Every good decision is prompted by and accomplished through grace.

When thinking about choices in the context

of the Christmas season, I found myself wondering about the choices of the Magi as they set out on a journey that changed their lives. Most people would have regarded their choice as foolish. T. S. Eliot captured the challenges of the Magi against harsh conditions in his poem "The Journey of the Magi."

*A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.*

The journey entailed crossing foreign lands, unforgiving desert terrain, questioning eyes and mocking smiles, yet they continued with nothing to guide them but a star. It was a choice that required more than curiosity; it required faith.

Somewhere deep within the center of their souls existed a longing to experience a glimpse of the divine regardless of the cost. They may not have been able to identify it as a hunger for God, but that's what it was.

We could apply the same thinking to the spiritual hunger that lies deep within the center of every human being — a hunger that can only be satisfied by God. The spiritual hunger that motivated the Wise Men to remain faithful to the journey should remind us of our own deepest hunger, which no amount of food will satisfy.

The resolve of the Magi raises questions for me about my own faith journey and the choices I make.

Do I obscure my spiritual hunger by filling it with all that pleases the palate, massage its ache, or silence its groaning with the busyness of the day?

Have I grown deaf to the whisper of the Holy

Spirit and allowed cynicism to dim the light surrounding the birth of Christ?

After the wise men worshiped the Son of God, they were changed. Enlightened by their encounter, each could proclaim with divine certitude:

*I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.*

(T.S. Eliot)

And so, we might ask: How has worshipping the Infant God changed our priorities and resolve? Health officials have schooled us regarding the wisdom of taking precautions. Although many have grown COVID weary, to let our guard down invites danger.

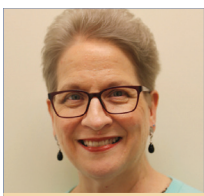
The same could be said of our spiritual journey. We celebrate the journey of the Magi every year, not to confirm their experience, but to be changed by it. We learn from them because when this crisis is over, there will be others.

The storms in life come along not as punishments but as interventions, prompting us to re-evaluate where we've been and where we're going because we will live with the consequences.

As the New Year beckons, let us pray that this year's challenges and choices become a means of ongoing transformation. Like the Wise Men, may we allow ourselves to be guided by the light of faith that burns and guides us from within.

Barbara Hughes is an author, retreat facilitator and spiritual guide. She lives in Virginia Beach and can be reached at brhughes16@gmail.com.

Learn the Wise Men's way of being 'faithful followers'



**BELIEVE AS
YOU PRAY**
MELANIE CODDINGTON

Remember Hale-Bopp — the comet that appeared in 1997? I remember the wonder I felt, gazing into the heavens at that bright smear of light. Driving home in darkness, I searched the sky for its familiar glow and found a reassuring sense of orientation. In the weeks that it shown so brightly, I came to understand how once a great mystery unfolding in the sky, a star of wonder, drew the Magi to the Christ child.

With Isaiah-eyes, we share the vision of exiles returning from Babylon through darkness and thick clouds: A faint glow gradually becomes a city splashed in light by the glory of God.

As the light spreads, we look around us and see others on the journey — sons and daughters, not only exiles but pilgrims coming from every land and nation, all in procession toward the holy city, the new Jerusalem. Among the throng we notice camels (hard to miss), kings from distant lands, and bearers of gifts, expensive (gold) and exotic (frankincense).

In Psalm 72, we discover the source of the

light: the rule of justice and peace by a king whose primary and enduring concern lies with the poor and afflicted, the marginalized and victimized, those with "no one to help."

This one will establish shalom (justice, peace, the fullness of good) over the whole world (to the outer limits of Israel's imagination), from the Red Sea to the great Mediterranean, from Ethiopia all the way to Spain (Tarshish).

Today's Gospel introduces "magi from the east," i.e., wise ones, astrologers, stargazers, who set off on a journey after witnessing a stunning celestial event. In their search for the "newborn king of the Jews" they look first to the palace.

King Herod, all smiles on the surface, senses the threat to his power. "Greatly troubled," he summons the priests and scribes and determines the likely birthplace of the Messiah, Bethlehem. This useful intelligence Herod provides to the Magi, in exchange for the precise time of the star's appearance.

He then sends them on their way, instructing them to "search diligently" and send word when they find the child, so that he also may come and "do him homage." As readers and hearers of this story, we know that his intentions are anything but honorable.

The Magi continue their journey, aided by Herod's sketchy directions and the surer guidance of the star. Joy overflows when they finally reach their destination. The star shines "over

the place," and as they enter the house, they see the child with Mary, his mother. (Note: Matthew's text provides neither number nor names for the Magi and they find the Christ child in a house, not a stable.)

The guests fall on their faces in worship; then, recovering their dignity, offer their gifts. Gold and frankincense, we recognize from Isaiah, but Matthew's account includes a third, myrrh, pointing toward Christ's death and burial.

Three gifts, along with the kings depicted in Isaiah and Psalm 72, lead eventually to the tradition of three kingly visitors with exotic names. With their tribute offered and accepted, the visitors presumably get a good night's rest, for warned in a dream, they set off in an unexpected direction, giving the scheming king the slip.

To whom does this epiphany (revelation, manifestation, appearance of divine glory) belong? Isaiah's testimony makes a strong case for Israel, as he describes the throngs headed to Jerusalem, drawn by the shining radiance of God's glory residing there.

St. Paul calls the Gentiles "coheirs" with God's first people. In Matthew, the mystical hints of divine incarnation pierce the ready hearts of strangers, foreigners, others, while King Herod "and all Jerusalem with him" play catch up and deploy damage control.

Therein lies the twist in this story: Insiders, who think themselves entitled to the glory, miss it; while outsiders, seeing just the glimmer, follow it faithfully and discover their heart's desire.

Melanie holds a master's in pastoral studies from Loyola University, New Orleans.

Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord

Is 60:1-6

Ps 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13

Eph 3:2-3a, 5-6

Mt 2:1-12

OPPORTUNITIES

Church of the Redeemer, Mechanicsville, has an immediate opening for a Christ-centered, innovative and passionate individual to serve our Youth and Young Adult Ministry. This position is responsible for developing and providing a total catechetical program for youth (Grades 6-12) and promoting a variety of activities for our youth and young adults. This will include evangelization, outreach, community building, liturgical experiences and communicating catechetical needs to the pastor.

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SHORTAKES

Join Msgr. Patrick Golden, pastor of Our Lady of Nazareth, Roanoke, on a **Pilgrimage to Poland, Prague and Budapest,** Sept. 18-30, 2021. We will reflect on the lives of St. Faustina and St. Pope John Paul II. In addition, experience scenic and historic Central Europe. 13-day tour for \$4,299 including airfare, hotels, tours, meals, Mass every day in holy places, including at Our Lady Victorious, home of the Infant Jesus of Prague, and much more.

For further information, please contact: Alba Kim: 804-298-4035 or email: tours@albastours.com or visit www.albastours.com.

Reservations are available now. Space is limited. COVID policies available upon request.

WHAT WE'VE HEARD



Good people doing good things I: During this season of giving, it is fitting that we learned about the generosity of Bianca Toboz, a second grader at Star of the Sea School, Virginia Beach. She used all of the gift cards she received for her birthday to purchase toys

for the school's Toys for Tots collection. Another example of practicing what is taught in Catholic schools.

Good people doing good things II: The 15-member Young Vincentians — an offshoot of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul Conference at St. Michael the Archangel, Glen Allen — packed and helped deliver 29 food baskets distributed by the organization the Monday and Tuesday before Thanksgiving. Much of the food came from a collection at Our Lady of Hope Health Center.

Safe, beneficial place for you to visit this Christmas season: You'll find Catholic news, information and inspiration at www.catholicvirginian.org.

What have you heard? The CV would like to know what you've heard — or read — regarding Catholics in your community receiving honors and awards, as well as achievements, accomplishments and other good stuff. We'll try to publish a selection of submissions in each issue of the CV. Put "What we've heard" in the subject line and email your item to acarneal@catholicvirginian.org. Include your name and phone number in case we need to follow up. Information cannot be taken over the phone.

Poverty, not presents, at heart of Christmas

JUNNO AROCHO ESTEVES
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Current restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic can help people put Christ, and not the constant need to purchase gifts, at the center of the Christmas season, Pope Francis said.

During his Sunday Angelus address Dec. 20, the pope told pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square that instead of complaining or buying "the umpteenth gift for ourselves and our friends," Christians should do something for the less fortunate "whom no one thinks of."

"In order for Jesus to be born in us, let's prepare our hearts, let's pray, let's not be swept up by consumerism," he said. "It is Jesus that is important. Consumerism is not found in the manger in Bethlehem: there is reality, poverty, love."

Before concluding his address, the pope called on the international community to help hundreds of thousands of maritime workers who are "stranded on ships, beyond the terms of their contracts, and are unable to return home" due to the pandemic.

"I ask the Virgin Mary, Stella Maris, to comfort these people and all those in difficult situations, and I urge governments to do all they can to enable them to return to their loved ones," he said.

According to the U.N. International Maritime Organization (IMO), an estimated 400,000 seafarers around the world are stranded on their ships while a "similar number of seafarers are stuck at home, unable to join ships and provide for their families."

In a statement marking Human Rights Day Dec. 10, Kitack Lim, IMO secretary general,

See Christmas, Page 12



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El Papa Francisco convoca a un “Año de San José”

Con la Carta apostólica *Patris corde* (Con corazón de padre), el Pontífice recuerda el 150 aniversario de la declaración de san José como Patrono de la Iglesia Universal y, con motivo de esta ocasión, a partir de hoy y hasta el 8 de diciembre de 2021 se celebrará un año dedicado especialmente a él.

Vatican News - Ciudad del Vaticano

Un padre amado, un padre en la ternura, en la obediencia y en la acogida; un padre de valentía creativa, un trabajador, siempre en la sombra: con estas palabras el Papa Francisco describe a san José de una manera tierna y conmovedora. Lo hace en la Carta apostólica *Patris corde*, publicada hoy con motivo del 150 aniversario de la declaración del Esposo de María como Patrono de la Iglesia Católica. De hecho, fue el Beato Pío IX con el decreto *Quemadmodum Deus*, firmado el 8 de diciembre de 1870, quien quiso este título para san José. Para celebrar este aniversario, el Pontífice ha convocado, desde hoy y hasta el 8 de diciembre de 2021, un “Año” especial dedicado al padre putativo de Jesús. En el trasfondo de la Carta apostólica, está la pandemia de Covid-19 que -escribe Francisco- nos ha hecho comprender la importancia de la gente común, de aquellos que, lejos del protagonismo, ejercen la paciencia e infunden esperanza cada día, sembrando la corresponsabilidad. Como san José, “el hombre que pasa desapercibido, el hombre de la presencia diaria, discreta y oculta”. Y sin embargo, el suyo es “un protagonismo sin igual en la historia de la salvación”.

Padre amado, tierno y obediente

San José, de hecho, expresó concretamente su paternidad al haber hecho de su vida una oblación de sí mismo en el amor puesto al servicio del Mesías. De ahí su papel como “la pieza que une el Antiguo y el Nuevo Testamento”, “siempre ha sido amado por el pueblo cristiano” (1). En él, “Jesús vio la ternura de Dios”, la ternura que nos hace “aceptar nuestra debilidad”, porque “es a través y a pesar de nuestra debilidad” que la mayoría de los designios divinos se realizan. “Sólo la ternura nos salvará de la obra” del Acusador, subraya el Pontífice, y es al encontrar la misericordia de Dios, especialmente en el Sacramento de la Reconciliación, que podemos hacer “una experiencia de verdad y de ternura”, porque “Dios no nos condena, sino que nos acoge, nos abraza, nos sostiene, nos perdona” (2). José es también un padre en obediencia a Dios: con su “fiat” salva a María y a Jesús y enseña a su Hijo a “hacer la voluntad del Padre”. Llamado por Dios a servir a la misión de Jesús, “coopera en el gran misterio de la redención y es verdaderamente un ministro de la salvación” (3).

Padre en la acogida de la voluntad de Dios y del prójimo

Al mismo tiempo, José es “un padre en la acogida”, porque “acogió a María sin poner condiciones previas”, un gesto importante aún hoy -afirma Francisco- “en este mundo donde la violencia psicológica, verbal y física sobre la mujer es patente”. Pero el Esposo de María es también el que, confiando en el Señor, acoge en su vida incluso los acontecimientos que no comprende, dejando de lado sus razonamientos y reconciliándose con su propia historia. La vida espiritual de José no “muestra una vía que explica, sino una vía que acoge”, lo que no significa que sea “un hombre que se resigna pasivamente”. Al contrario: su protagonismo es “valiente y fuerte” porque con “la fortaleza del Espíritu Santo”, aquella “llena de



Una imagen de san José aparece en la parroquia de Santa María Josefa en Roma el 19 de febrero de 2017. En una carta apostólica del 8 de diciembre, el papa Francisco proclamó un año dedicado a san José, padre adoptivo de Jesús. (Foto CNS/Paul Haring)

esperanza”, sabe “hacer sitio incluso a esa parte contradictoria, inesperada y decepcionante de la existencia”. En la práctica, a través de san José, es como si Dios nos repitiera: “¡No tengas miedo!”, porque “la fe da sentido a cada acontecimiento feliz o triste” y nos hace conscientes de que “Dios puede hacer que las flores broten entre las rocas”. Y no sólo eso: José “no buscó atajos”, sino que enfrentó “‘con los ojos abiertos’ lo que le acontecía, asumiendo la responsabilidad en primera persona”. Por ello, su acogida “nos invita a acoger a los demás, sin exclusiones, tal como son, con preferencia por los débiles” (4).

Padre valiente y creativo, ejemplo de amor a la Iglesia y a los pobres

Patris corde destaca “la valentía creativa” de san José, aquella que surge sobre todo en las dificultades y que da lugar a recursos inesperados en el hombre. “El carpintero de Nazaret -explica el Papa- sabía transformar un problema en una oportunidad, anteponiendo siempre la confianza en la Providencia”. Se enfrentaba a “los problemas concretos” de su familia, al igual que todas las demás familias del mundo, especialmente las de los migrantes. En este sentido, san José es “realmente un santo patrono especial” de aquellos que, “forzados por las adversidades y el hambre”, tienen que abandonar su patria a causa de “la guerra, el odio, la persecución y la miseria”. Custodio de Jesús y María, José “no puede dejar de ser el Custodio de la Iglesia”, de su maternidad y del Cuerpo de Cristo: cada necesitado, pobre, sufriente, moribundo, extranjero, prisionero, enfermo, es “el Niño” que José guarda y de él hay que aprender a “amar a la Iglesia y a los pobres” (5).

Padre que enseña el valor, la dignidad y la alegría del trabajo

Honesto carpintero que trabajó “para asegurar el sustento de su familia”, José también nos enseña “el valor, la dignidad y la alegría” de “comer el pan que es fruto del propio trabajo”. Este significado del padre adoptivo de Jesús le da al Papa la oportunidad de lanzar un llamamiento a favor del trabajo, que se ha convertido en “una urgente cuestión social”, incluso en países con un cierto nivel de bienestar. “Es necesario comprender”, escribe Francisco, “el significado del trabajo que da dignidad”, que “se convierte en participación en la obra misma de la salvación” y “ocasión de realización” para uno mismo y su familia, el “núcleo original de la sociedad”. Quien

trabaja, colabora con Dios porque se convierte en “un poco creador del mundo que nos rodea”. De ahí la exhortación del Papa a todos a “redescubrir el valor, la importancia y la necesidad del trabajo para dar lugar a una nueva ‘normalidad’ en la que nadie quede excluido”. Mirando en particular el empeoramiento del desempleo debido a la pandemia de Covid-19, el Papa llama a todos a “revisar nuestras prioridades” para comprometerse a decir: “¡Ningún joven, ninguna persona, ninguna familia sin trabajo!” (6).

Padre en la sombra, descentrado por amor a María y Jesús

Siguiendo el ejemplo de la obra “La sombra del Padre” del escritor polaco Jan Dobraczyński, el Pontífice describe la paternidad de José respecto de Jesús como “la sombra del Padre celestial en la tierra”. “Nadie nace padre, sino que se hace”, afirma Francisco, porque se hace “cargado de él”, responsabilizándose de su vida. Desgraciadamente, en la sociedad actual “los niños a menudo parecen no tener padre”, padres capaces de “introducir al niño en la experiencia de la vida”, sin retenerlo ni “poseerlo”, pero haciéndolo “capaz de elegir, de ser libre, de salir”. En este sentido, José tiene el apelativo de “castísimo”, que es “lo contrario a poseer”: él, de hecho, “fue capaz de amar de una manera extraordinariamente libre”, “sabía cómo descentrarse” para poner en el centro de su vida no a sí mismo, sino a Jesús y María. Su felicidad está “en el don de sí mismo”: nunca frustrado y siempre confiado, José permanece en silencio, sin quejarse, pero haciendo “gestos concretos de confianza”. Su figura es, por lo tanto, ejemplar, señala el Papa, en un mundo que “necesita padres y rechaza a los amos”, que refuta a aquellos que confunden “autoridad con autoritarismo, servicio con servilismo, confrontación con opresión, caridad con asistencialismo, fuerza con destrucción”. El verdadero padre es aquel que “rehúsa la tentación de vivir la vida de los hijos” y respeta su libertad, porque la paternidad vivida en plenitud hace “inútil” al propio padre, “cuando ve que el hijo ha logrado ser autónomo y camina solo por los senderos de la vida”. Ser padre “nunca es un ejercicio de posesión”, subraya Francisco, sino “un ‘signo’ que nos evoca una paternidad superior”, al “Padre celestial” (7).

La oración diaria del Papa a san José y ese “cierto reto”

Concluida con una oración a san José, *Patris corde* revela también, en la nota número 10, un hábito de la vida de Francisco: cada día, de hecho, “durante más de cuarenta años”, el Pontífice recita una oración al Esposo de María “tomada de un libro de devociones francés del siglo XIX, de la Congregación de las Religiosas de Jesús y María”. Es una oración que “expresa devoción y confianza” a san José, pero también “un cierto reto”, explica el Papa, porque concluye con las palabras: “Que no se diga que te haya invocado en vano, muéstrame que tu bondad es tan grande como tu poder”.

Indulgencia plenaria para el “Año de San José”

Junto a la publicación de la Carta apostólica *Patris corde*, se ha publicado el Decreto de la Penitenciaría Apostólica que anuncia el “Año de San José” especial convocado por el Papa y la relativa concesión del “don de indulgencias especiales”. Se dan indicaciones específicas para los días tradicionalmente dedicados a la memoria del Esposo de María, como el 19 de marzo y el 1 de mayo, y para los enfermos y ancianos “en el contexto actual de la emergencia sanitaria”.

Vaccine

Continued from Page 1

committee chairmen emphasized that any such cell lines were derived from tissue samples taken from fetuses aborted in the 1960s and 1970s and have been grown in laboratories all over the world since then.

“It is important to note that the making of the rubella vaccine — or that of the new COVID-19 vaccines — does not involve cells taken directly from the body of an aborted child,” Bishop Rhoades and Archbishop Naumann said. “Cells taken from two abortions in the 1960s were replicated in a laboratory to produce two cell lines that can be reproduced again and again, indefinitely.”

“To make the rubella vaccine, cells from these cell lines are stimulated to produce the chemicals necessary for the vaccine,” they explained. “It is not as if the making of the vaccine required ever more cells from ever more abortions.”

Vatican guidance

The two committee chairmen said the Vatican, through the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Pontifical Academy for Life, “has offered guidance on

the question of whether it is morally acceptable to receive a vaccine that has been created with the use of morally compromised cell lines.”

Both the congregation and the academy “emphasize the positive moral obligation to do good,” they said, “and in so doing to distance oneself as much as possible from the immoral act of another party such as abortion in order to avoid cooperation with someone else’s evil actions and to avoid giving scandal, which could happen if one’s own actions were perceived by other people to ignore or to minimize the evil of the action.”

“Our love of neighbor should lead us to avoid giving scandal, but we cannot omit fulfilling serious obligations such as the prevention of deadly infection and the spread of contagion among those who are vulnerable just to avoid the appearance of scandal,” the two prelates said.

Beware of complacency

At the same time, the bishops also cautioned Catholics against complacency about the moral issue of abortion and ethical issues surrounding the development of some vaccines.

“While having ourselves and our families immunized

against COVID-19 with the new vaccines is morally permissible and can be an act of self-love and of charity toward others, we must not allow the gravely immoral nature of abortion to be obscured,” Bishop Rhoades and Archbishop Naumann said.

“It is true that one can receive benefits from an evil action in the past without intending that action or approving of it. The association with the evil action that comes with receiving benefits from that evil action, however, can have a corrupting influence on one’s perception of the evil action, making it more difficult to recognize it as evil,” they explained.

“One might become desensitized to the gravely evil nature of that action. One might become complacent about that action and ignore the obligation to do what one can to oppose the evil action,” they said, adding that others might see “one’s acceptance of benefits from an evil action” and feel the action isn’t really evil, feel less urgency “to oppose that evil” or even miss opportunities to do what they can “to oppose it.”

Editor’s note: Any updates on this story will appear at www.catholicvirginian.org.

Christmas

Continued from Page 10

said that while maritime workers have been on the frontline of the pandemic, delivering food, medicine and goods, their “human rights have been put in jeopardy.”

“Failure to protect the rights of seafarers, fishers and other marine personnel and resolve the crew change crisis will have a detrimental effect on ship safety and the global supply chain. The longer the situation persists, the worse those effects will be,” Lim said.

In his talk before praying the Angelus prayer, the pope reflected on the Sunday Gospel reading from St. Luke which recounted the Annunciation. While the angel’s announcement that she will bear the son of God was one of joy, it also foretold a great trial for Mary.

Mary’s response was not resignation nor did she “express a weak and submissive acceptance, but rather she expresses a strong desire, a vivacious desire.”

Poor

Continued from Page 5

St. John the Baptist was preaching about the Messiah’s presence in the world, the cardinal said, the challenge was to get people to accept that the Messiah was fully human, that he had a physical body “so similar to ours, except for sin.”

Saying that God became human was a scandal, he said. But “today it is especially his mystical body, the church, that creates difficulty and scandalizes — it’s so similar to the rest of humanity, not even excluding sin.”

Service

Continued from Page 1

She quickly developed a plan: close the dining room but try to keep the kitchen open to provide hot meals to go and follow protocols to keep people safe.

Volunteers arrive, stay

That’s when a team of volunteers from Our Lady of Nazareth (OLN), Roanoke, stepped in. OLN has a long history of parishioners and clergy helping at RAM House, which is housed in the two-story brick building that once was the parish’s school and which is still owned by the Diocese of Richmond.

But, Trellue said, this was a completely new, and dangerous, situation. She expected that all volunteers would choose to stay home, understandably.

Yet, to her surprise, not all of them did. Even though they are all in the at-risk age category, a small group of mostly women from OLN arrived at the kitchen with masked faces and gloved hands, rolled up their sleeves and tied on their aprons.

“These folks from OLN have been lifesavers,” Trellue said. “They have kept the kitchen open.”

When guests arrive at RAM House, they stop at a hand-washing station and receive a wellness and temperature check before filing inside to receive a hot meal in a carry-out container and a bottle of water. Volunteers also pack bag lunches to be delivered to the homeless in the area who cannot come to the site.

“I asked myself, ‘What does my faith call me to do?’” said Colleen Hernandez, OLN parishioner and a Benedictine oblate. “I have to do this. Even when things were so dire at first, my faith challenged me to help them.”

Other area churches and organizations, both Catholic and non-Catholic, have helped in various ways, explained RAM executive director Melissa Woodson, but Our Lady of Nazareth has gone above and beyond all expectations.

“I thank God for these OLN volunteers,” she said. “I don’t know what we would do without them.”

What God called them to do

Paula Moore, the weekday kitchen manager, noted, “These people are wonderful; they really pitch in.” She added that there was enough help scheduled for Thanksgiving. “It’s amazing that we have OLN volunteers willing to work on their holiday.”

On Thanksgiving Day, OLN parishioners Mickie Asbury, Catherine Black, Tom Dalzell and Pat Oberlin helped weekend kitchen manager Sheila Campbell cook and pack hot turkey dinners for RAM House guests.

Asbury, a retired social worker, had previously worked with fellow parishioners Tricia Chopski and Maggie Bradley in the RAM clothing closet, which provides free clothing to those in need. When it closed, the three — whom Hernandez calls “the backbone” of the volunteer effort — moved to the kitchen.

“I prayed about continuing to volunteer, and thought, ‘Who’s going to cook for these poor blessed souls?’” said Asbury, who loves to cook and said serving food to the hungry is an important part of her spiritual life. “We use our hands and feet to become the body of Christ. We all have a moral obligation to do what we can to help others and to be loving and kind.”

Marketing director and executive assistant

Molly Archer observed, “These OLN volunteers have enhanced my own faith. They say this is what God is calling them to do.”

Thanks to their reliable help while following protocols, she said, the meal service has continued in its new form without a break.

“It really shows God’s grace and provision,” she said. “He has provided every step of the way.”

Seeing the face of Christ

OLN volunteers often tell the staff how much they love RAM House and how they gain far more than they give.

“I have become closer to God through this work,” said Asbury. “The people who come here are so humble and appreciative, and I see the face of Christ in them.”

Those parishioners who cannot help in person assist in other ways, e.g., donating money and food, including fresh produce grown in OLN’s Giving Garden, and by keeping RAM House in their daily prayers and thoughts.

Parishioner Lee Blair previously organized the parish’s monthly Sunday meal preparation and service for RAM House but has not been able to return since the pandemic began. A while ago, she asked a guest about his life story; what he said moved and remained with her.

“He was quite taken aback by the kindness of the people at RAM House who feed him,” Blair said. “What it’s taught me is that we must never judge other people because we don’t know what they’ve been through.”

“We’ve been amazed at the support of OLN,” Trellue said. “They tell me: ‘We’re being cautious, but it is our Catholic Christian mission to serve.’ It’s so inspiring. This is lifesaving work.”