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Director answers God's call to protect children

Nazia Shafi leading diocesan Office of Safe Environment

BRIAN T. OLSZEWSKI
The Catholic Virginian

For nearly 20 years, Nazia Shafi worked in human resources. It's the field for which her formal education — a bachelor's degree in quality management and a master's in human resource management — prepared her. She trained and managed staff, did strategic planning, conducted employee performance reviews and led team meetings. She set goals and objectives, and taught others to do the same.

But in 2019, a year after leaving the corporate world, she entered a different employment realm.

"I never thought about working for the Church, and then this opportunity came. I saw actually an advertisement for the Asian ministry position in The Catholic Virginian," she said. "And that's when I thought, 'Let me call and see if it's for me.'"

She contacted Camboni Sister Inma Cuesta-Ventura, director of the Office of Ethnic Ministries, to learn more about the job. As she listened, Shafi said she thought, "Okay, so this is not for me" and was planning to leave.

But the nun assured her that she didn't need to know the languages or the cultures of the people the office served. Shafi speaks Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi and basic French, and is "working on my Spanish."

"She told me, 'You can learn about that. I encourage you to apply for the job,'" Shafi recalled of her hiring. "So I did, and that's what God wanted me to do."

God had other plans for her. When the directorship for the Office of Safe Environment opened

in 2020, she applied and was hired in June.

"The same thing happened with this position," Shafi said. "I would never have thought about applying for this job because I just never thought about it. But that's what God wanted me to do."

'Good measures for accountability'

Shafi became director of the Office of Safe Environment in the midst of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' annual audit of every diocese's safe environment program to ensure that it is in compliance with the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People."

At the same time, she needed to provide BrownGreer, who was handling the diocese's Independent Reconciliation Program, with information they needed in order to evaluate the claims that were brought to them.

Although the cases happened many years ago, Shafi said that what she read was "troubling."

"Just to read those cases, to see the pain that the victims

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Nazia Shafi

Preparing baskets of Easter joy



Volunteers from the Church of the Epiphany, Richmond, prepare Easter baskets, Monday, March 29, as part of a parish engagement project sponsored by Commonwealth Catholic Charities (CCC). The agency partnered with several parishes and other entities that collected more than 500 baskets filled with candy, cards and books which were distributed to families at CCC's St. Francis House Food Pantry in Roanoke and to refugee families, children in foster care, children of mothers receiving pregnancy counseling, and incapacitated and aging adults served by CCC. (Photo provided)

Vatican: Change lifestyles to help mitigate effects of climate change

CINDY WOODEN
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Whether people admit it or not, climate change and environmental destruction are forcing millions from their homes, and Catholics have a responsibility to assist them, Pope Francis wrote in the preface to a new document.

"When people are driven out because their local environment has become uninhabitable, it might look like a process of nature, something inevitable," the pope wrote. "Yet the deteriorating climate is very often the result of poor choices and destructive activity, of selfishness and neglect, that set humankind at odds with creation, our common home."

The papal preface appears in "Pastoral Orientations on Climate Displaced People," a document released March 30 by the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

Displacement 'real emergency'

In addition to offering parishes, dioceses and national bishops' conferences suggestions for offering pastoral care to people forced to move because of rising sea levels, desertification and increasingly strong storms, the document encourages Catholics to study and track climate

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Child protection permeates who we are as Church



CHRIST OUR HOPE
MOST REV. BARRY C. KNESTOUT

While child abuse prevention is a focus of the secular community during April, child protection is an ongoing commitment in our diocese and our parishes. We continue to take seriously the matter of protecting children, youth and vulnerable adults in all of our Church environments.

The scourge of child sexual abuse by clergy is a painful, indelible mark on the Church. While we cannot erase it, we must continue to heal from it, learn from it and do all we can to prevent it from ever happening again. Healing and prevention are at the heart of our efforts.

In our diocese, the healing occurs through outreach to victim survivors of those who, as children, were sexually abused by clergy. Our Victim Assistance Program and last year's Independent Reconciliation Program that paid \$6.3 million to 51 victim survivors are indicative of the scope of that outreach, of our belief that victim survivors and our Church are always in the process of healing.

In order to heal, we must be transparent in all we say and do. As St. John writes in his first letter, we are called to love "in deed and truth" (18). In 2018, we published the names of clergy against whom a substantiated allegation of child sexual abuse has been confirmed. We publicize when an allegation has been made and is under review, and when a decision has been made. If the substantiated allegation involves a person who is in active ministry, that person is removed pending the outcome of the investigation.

Prayer is integral to what we undertake in fostering healing and protecting our children. We have celebrated Masses of Atonement to further that healing. On Wednesday, April 14, 7 p.m., we will again pray the Rosary for the Protection of Children and Families — an essential part of our observance of Child Abuse Prevention Month. I invite you to pray with me that evening at www.richmonddiocese.org/livestream.

We have become more vigilant in making certain that all of our Church environments in which adults interact with children are the safest they can be. We do thorough background checks on all who have contact with children, and we provide employees and volunteers

with ongoing VIRTUS training so that they are equipped to recognize signs of potential child abuse.

Child protection is a priority for us, something that underlies and permeates the heart and soul of who we are as Church and what we do. It is evident in the context of our entire mission of teaching the faith, celebrating the sacraments, calling people to holiness and deepening their relationship with Christ, and reaching out in charity.

Day after day, we carry out that mission in ways that are appropriate, sensitive and pastoral. Our care and love for those we serve includes a firm, permanent commitment to protecting children and all who are vulnerable. In short, child protection cannot be — and is not — an afterthought for our diocese and parishes.

During this Easter season, we are reminded of the new life God has given to us. Through the death and resurrection of his Son, we have overcome sin, opening the path to eternal life for us. On that path we are called to live a life of virtue, a life that reflects the Gospel to all whom we seek and encounter.

May that reflection extend to all we do in protecting our children from abuse.

Build culture of transparency, bishops' committee says

Child protection requires 'ongoing critical assessment of policies'

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Members of the U.S. bishops' Committee on the Protection of Children and Young People have agreed with the National Review Board's call that the Catholic Church must continue to build a culture of accountability and transparency regarding clergy sexual abuse.

Bishop James V. Johnson Jr. of Kansas City-St. Joseph, Missouri, committee chairman, said in a statement that the members also agree with the all-lay review board "on the need to identify, address and correct systemic failures which hinder the best response to allegations."

The reaction was posted in March on the committee's page on the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' website, www.usccb.org.

It came in response to a Dec. 16 National Review Board statement following the release of the Vatican's report on its investigation into how former Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick was able to rise up the Catholic hierarchical structure despite the repeated rumors, anonymous letters, allegations and even settlements with alleged victims of abuse.

The review board, chaired by Suzanne Healy, said in its statement that the Vatican report, while "precedent setting and a commendable step in addressing clerical abuse ... points out woeful and systemic failures in

"The NRB statement encourages the bishops to build on the progress the Church has made. Safeguarding is an evolutionary process which emerges from a commitment to integrity, fidelity to upholding moral norms of behavior, and ongoing critical assessment of policies and outcomes."

— U.S. BISHOPS' COMMITTEE ON THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

the lack of oversight and inaction in handling former allegations at many levels."

McCarrick, the onetime cardinal of Washington, resigned from the College of Cardinals in July 2018. After a canonical process found him guilty in February 2019 of "solicitation in the sacrament of confession and sins against the Sixth Commandment with minors and with adults, with the aggravating factor of the abuse of power," Pope Francis dismissed

him from the priesthood.

The NRB called for "systemic failures" to be "addressed and corrected" and that in doing so the Church will build a culture that is "unafraid to require accountability on the part of bishops, transparency when allegations surface, the willingness of bishops to speak up and correct each other when appropriate."

Board members also acknowledged that in the wake of the Vatican report, "many bishops" have

made a commitment to transparency and accountability.

Every child and vulnerable adult must be at the center of the Church's protection and safety practices, the board said, acknowledging steps taken by individual bishops and the USCCB to do so.

"We applaud the efforts of the bishops these past years. The Church has worked diligently to correct past failures. Its primary commitment is to promote healing and reconciliation with survivors," the NRB said.

Board members also expressed gratitude for Pope Francis issuing his "motu proprio" (on his own accord) in May 2019, "Vos Estis Lux Mundi" ("You Are the Light of the World"), which promotes bishops' accountability and established procedures for handling accusations of abuse against bishops.

The bishops' committee emphasized in its statement the commitment "To Protect and To Heal" is a continuous effort.

"The NRB statement encourages the bishops to build on the progress the Church has made," the committee said. "Safeguarding is an evolutionary process which emerges from a commitment to integrity, fidelity to upholding moral norms of behavior, and ongoing critical assessment of policies and outcomes."

Non-traditional fundraiser generates \$24,000

Star of the Sea School emphasizes stewardship, acts of kindness

WENDY KLESCH

Special to The Catholic Virginian

Students at Star of the Sea Catholic School, Virginia Beach, know that kindness counts. All the way to 1,506 and beyond.

The school embarked on a different sort of fundraising campaign this year. There were no candles to sell, no raffle baskets for parents to assemble. Instead, students asked friends and family to sponsor them as they set off on a three-week journey into exploring the meaning of stewardship, pledging to serve their communities and to look for thoughtful ways of showing their care and appreciation for others along the way.

“During this time of COVID, everyone is struggling. Everyone wants to help one another, everyone wants to do what they can to make things better,” Carey Averill, principal of Star of the Sea, said. “It seemed the perfect time to try something new.”

The 251 students embraced the idea, Averill said, letting their lights shine during Lent in a myriad of unexpected ways, tallying of 1,506 acts of kindness and raising more than \$24,000 for their school in the process.

Paying back in kind

Kristin Markle, Home and School Association online fundraising coordinator, said that Star of the Sea managed the program with the help of Raise Craze, an online fundraising platform.

Once registered with the site, students set up individual account pages, where they created their own, unique lists of all that they proposed to do for their community. The pages were then sent to family and friends, along with a message asking them to sponsor their student with a donation to the school.

Students checked off their tasks as they completed them, Markle said, so that their sponsors could see their progress.

“What I loved about it was how well it fit in with what we are trying to encourage at our school and that it helps the students understand the idea of stewardship,” Markle said.

Many hands, great work

Star of the Sea kicked off the first week of the fundraiser with several school-wide projects, creating a buzz of activity on the campus. Students decorated lunch bags for the parish’s Social Outreach Ministry, wrote letters of appreciation to deployed military and assembled 455 “blessings bags” — small gift bags filled with handmade cards, rosaries and chocolate — for residents of Marian Manor and Our Lady of Perpetual Help, two assisted living homes in Virginia Beach.

Students also held a food drive to stock the parish food pantry, collecting two minivans full of canned and boxed goods, fruit



Swimming in a sea of kindness, Carey Averill, principal at Star of the Sea School, Virginia Beach, and a second grade class do the “dab” during “chalk the walk” — part of the school’s three-week fundraiser focusing on stewardship and acts of kindness. (Photo/Janet White)

cups, granola bars and toilet paper.

A day was set aside, too, for students to spread a little cheer right at home, Averill said. During an event called “Chalk the Walk,” students were each given two pieces of sidewalk chalk and the school pavement as their canvas.

“It was so much fun,” she said. “We have two separate buildings at the school, so we have a lot of sidewalks to cover.”

By the end of the day, the gray cement was alive with yellow trees blooming in pink fields, blue bubbles and rainbow fish, all interspersed with the reminders to “Love others as Jesus loves you!” and that “God is Love” — messages meant to brighten the day of anyone who might happen by.

All in good fun

Teachers also encouraged students to find inventive ways to perpetuate the spirit of kindness by distributing “kindness coins” to those “caught” committing a good deed.

“One student came in early to wipe down tables, another helped the custodian,” Averill said. “One class wrote messages on Post-it notes and covered their prayer partners’ classroom door with them as a surprise. It was like that every day. The students just took off with it.”

At home, students continued their campaign, she said, decorating mailboxes with thank-you signs to postal workers, painting kindness rocks to hide in their neighbor-

hoods, and leaving thoughtful letters for their parents.

“I think Raise Craze was a great success because it encouraged kids to do the right thing during a fun activity,” seventh grader Sara Ankley said.

No matter how small

The Home and School Association hoped to raise \$5,000 over the course of the campaign, but, in the end, the students surpassed their goal, raising \$24,375. Some of the money will go toward paying for the use of the platform, Markle said, but Star of the Sea will keep \$22,941 of the proceeds.

The school plans to use part of the funds to purchase picnic tables and umbrellas for the school’s outdoor learning area, giving teachers a space in which to give lessons and hold activities outside.

And when the students do get to enjoy their new, outdoor classroom, they will know that they had a hand in helping their school.

“One of the best things about the program was that the students could do it all themselves and that everyone had the chance to participate,” Averill said. “Even the smallest students could open a door for a teacher or paint a kindness rock. They found there was no limit to what they could do. They were all doing something from the heart, and I just loved it.”

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Petersburg school's 'Acts of Kindness' get recognition

St. Joseph students taught, perform works of mercy

JENNIFER NEVILLE

Special to The Catholic Virginian

It was a “pay it forward” gesture. Sixth grade students at St. Joseph School, Petersburg, wrote thank you letters to cafeteria manager Lynn Mann for her kindness and dedication. That sparked Mann to write to Channel 12, a TV station covering the greater Richmond area, about how SJS students are worthy of recognition for the weekly Acts of Kindness series shown during the local news.

Reporter Anthony Antoine and his cameraman Dan Heffner went to the school Wednesday, March 24 to interview students and Mann. In evaluating nominations for Acts of Kindness, Antoine said he looks for “a unique way someone gives back to the community, and this really fit that bill.”

SJS educates 134 students from pre-K to eighth grade. In an effort to shape students as good citizens and disciples, they are taught to live their faith through community service and interactions with others.

“First and foremost,” said middle school social studies and religion teacher Matthew Eviston, “the school calls students to be in a relationship with one another, to view others as Christ sees them and to seek out and perform the works of mercy to one another.”

Community service projects



WWBT-TV reporter Anthony Antoine (back to the camera) interviews Shanon Taylor, a sixth grader at St. Joseph School, Petersburg, Wednesday, March 24, for the Richmond station's Acts of Kindness feature. The school's cafeteria manager, Lynn Mann, contacted the station to let them know why the students were worthy of recognition. At left is camera operator Dan Heffner. (Photo/Jennifer Neville)

have included making blankets for nursing home residents, assembling blessing bags for the homeless and making dog treats for an animal shelter. Students collected food for a local food pantry and baby items for a pregnancy crisis center.

Students treat others with virtues like kindness, temperance and respect — traits learned and re-enforced through the school's Peacemaker program, which features a different virtue each month, said Principal Sarah Owens.

When the virtue of kindness was emphasized, sixth graders wrote

thank you notes to Mann for the care she gives to students.

Due to COVID restrictions, she must assemble school lunches in separate packages for each student. Because she knows each pupil, she knows which condiments to include or how to arrange food so it doesn't touch for a student. She allows students to make the menu. Before distributing the meals, which average 60 to 65 each day, Mann draws a heart or smiley face on each container to let them know she is thinking of them.

When she saw an Acts of Kindness segment focused on how the

pandemic has changed people's lives, she thought of her students who have persevered despite COVID restrictions.

“It just hit me that day,” she said. “If anybody deserves the Acts of Kindness, it is my students. They have shown kindness to one another, to all of us, through this pandemic.”

Eviston described SJS students as energetic, joyful and “fruitful in the spirit.”

Citing examples of how students portray different virtues in their everyday interactions, sixth grader Ashton Ford noticed a student helping up a peer who fell on the ground. Isaiah Breeland, also sixth grade, said the value of temperance taught him to be “brave stand and up for other people.”

Shanon Taylor, sixth grade, addressed perseverance when she said, “I always am trying to be my best at everything.” She added that at the beginning of the year, she and a friend talked to a girl new to the school, and “she felt better.”

For some, like sixth grader Matthew Britt and second grader Coraline Owens, helping others is a key reason they like attending SJS.

“We get to donate to the poor, and it makes them have a better life. That's what makes it fun for me,” Owens said.

Similarly, Britt said, “It makes me feel good that the school can help people.”

Virginia bishops welcome end to death penalty

See it as 'hope-filled new beginning'

ZOEY MARAIST
Catholic News Service

ARLINGTON — While standing outside the prison that housed Virginia's execution chamber, Gov. Ralph Northam signed legislation abolishing the death penalty in the state March 24.

Legislators and anti-death penalty advocates joined the signing ceremony outside Greensville Correctional Center in Jarratt, where 101 people have been executed since 1991.

“Over our 400-year history, Virginia has executed more than 1,300 people,” said Northam. “(Today) we join 22 other states in saying the government will not take a life, the government will no longer execute people.”

Bishop Michael F. Burbidge of Arlington and Bishop Barry C. Knestout of Richmond, welcomed the new law.

“Looking back, we sadly reflect on our commonwealth's disturbing and tragic history of executions — carried out more frequently here than in any other state in our country's history. As we move forward, we embrace this hope-filled new beginning,” the bishops said.

The bishops continued, “As Pope Francis states, ‘The firm rejection of the death penalty shows to what extent it is possible to recognize the inalienable dignity of every human being and to accept that he or she has a place in this universe’” (Fratelli Tutti, no. 269).

They noted that through the Virginia Catholic Conference, they had supported this “historic legislation as it progressed through the General

Assembly because all human life is sacred. We are grateful to those who worked to make this a reality.”

“Our dioceses also continue our prayers for families of victims of horrific crimes and renew our commitment to provide for their pastoral support. We stand ready to accompany them in their journey to find healing and peace,” Bishops Burbidge and Knestout said.

Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, also welcomed the repeal, calling it “a bold step toward a culture of life.” He, too, noted that Virginia became the 23rd state to abolish the death penalty, “and I urge all other states and the federal government to do the same,” he said.

During the ceremony in Jarratt, many people praised the Catholic conference's advocacy, including bill-sponsor state Sen. Scott A. Surovell, a Democrat from Fairfax, Virginia, who thanked the conference and several priests for their work. “I can't tell you how much that has helped,” he said.

Earlier this year, Catholics welcomed the news that both houses of the legislature passed bills abolishing capital punishment.

“It's an incredible moment for Virginia,” said Bob More, a parishioner of St. John Neumann Church in Reston, “to finally uphold the dignity of every person including those who offended

against society in a serious way, and to recognize the death penalty has not been applied in a fair and defensible manner, and that people need an opportunity for rehabilitation and repentance.”

More, who previously participated in evening prayer vigils to end executions, made the comments in an interview with the Arlington Catholic Herald, the diocesan newspaper.

“The end of Virginia's death penalty signifies the growing consensus that capital punishment is a flawed and morally bankrupt system that violates the sanctity of human life,” said Krisanne Vaillancourt Murphy, executive director of Catholic Mobilizing Network.

“From the pews to the pulpit, many Virginia Catholics were persistent advocates who paved the way for the commonwealth's abolition of the death penalty,” she said in a March 24 statement.

A news release from the network said the modern U.S. death penalty system is “a direct byproduct” of the legacy of racial violence — slavery, lynching and systemic racism — in Virginia as the former “home of the Confederacy.”

“We are hopeful that Virginia's repeal will signal to other Southern states that the death penalty is an immoral and racist relic,” said Vaillancourt Murphy. “By removing the most broken and punitive of punishments, we can refocus on cultivating more just, equitable and life-affirming responses to harm.”

Mini-Loan Program attempts to keep payday lenders at bay

Society of St. Vincent de Paul effort 'helps friends in need'

ROSE MORRISETTE

Special to The Catholic Virginian

State legislators who fought to curb the predatory practices of short-term lenders breathed a sigh of relief when the Virginia Fairness in Lending Act of 2020 (HB 789/SB 421) went into effect Jan. 1.

Yet, even with this reformative legislation, Dan Kearns, president of both the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SVDP) St. Michael the Archangel Conference and the SVDP Richmond District Council, believes borrowing from short-term lenders is still not a good idea for the financially vulnerable served by the Society.

Kearns has been working to establish a viable option that protects the society's "friends in need" who must borrow to rectify untenable situations — a reality only exacerbated by the pandemic. His discomfort in seeing the payday loan and car title loan storefronts peppering the streets of Richmond made him begin to think about the problem and how to rectify it.

He found a solution in a low interest loan program some SVDP conferences and council in the U.S. have adopted. A Mini-Loan Program in Dallas serves as the model for what Kearns is doing locally in collaboration with Village Bank of Midlothian.

SVDP-partnership

The program involves an SVDP partnering with a local bank to provide low-interest loans to those with sustainable employment for the purpose of either refinancing or avoiding a payday loan, paying off credit cards or consolidating credit cards, or financing an emergency/unique need, typically medically related.

Providing a low-interest loan is intended to help a borrower come out of or avoid a "debt trap" — indebtedness that spirals out of control — and make progress toward



A poster about payday lending is seen in this illustration photo. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the Diocese of Richmond has begun a Mini-Loan Program to help those in need avoid using payday loans. (CNS photo/Suzanne Plunkett, Reuters)

becoming credit worthy.

Roy Barzel, Village Bank's executive vice president and chief credit officer, and Bill Foster, the bank's former president and CEO, were touched when they first heard about the purpose of the program.

"The act of kindness and love was so moving to us," Barzel recalled. "It is gratifying to think that you can help someone get out of a financial hole."

How it works

Loan applicants must show sustainable income and submit a budget to be approved for a loan. An SVDP loan committee carefully screens participants, verifies income, qualifies applicants and helps them with the loan process. In the end, however, the financial relationship/arrangement is between the borrower and the bank. Village Bank makes the loan, and the St. Michael's Conference secures it. The conference has \$20,000 in collateral for program loans in a money market fund.

"The money market account is cash secured and guaranteed by St. Michael's (Conference)," said Barzel. "The amount of hold on the

fund reduces as loan payments are made."

For the St. Michael's Conference, a mini-loan is a loan of no more than \$2,500 at 3% interest that must be repaid within 12-24 months.

The conference is limited to eight loans per year with the amount of its collateral.

"The bank doesn't report to the credit bureau, and it doesn't charge a fee if a payment is late," said Barzel. "If someone pays within 30 days, St. Michael's money market fund will not be debited; otherwise, it will."

The account is also debited if the loan recipient defaults on the loan.

Additional support needed

As president of the Richmond Council, Kearns hopes to engender more support for the Mini-Loan Program among other conferences, believing it's the next level of service to those in need.

He realizes, though, that it might be challenging for conferences in other localities to find partner banks. Barzel is willing to work with those in the Richmond area and would be happy to walk

another bank through the process.

To expand the program in other conferences would require raising collateral and more money, but Kearns indicated that the council would help. It would also help in making inroads with the bank model.

There are seven conferences in the Richmond District Council. In addition to St. Michael, there are St. Matthew, Virginia Beach; Sacred Heart, Perry Street, Richmond; St. Bridget, Richmond (with Holy Rosary); parishes in the Charlottesville area grouped into the Holy Trinity Conference; St. Andrews, Roanoke; and Holy Spirit, Virginia Beach. Each is a standalone 501(c)(3) nonprofit made up of volunteers, known as Vincentians, who have been doing the work of the society since its founding in France by Blessed Frédéric Ozanam nearly two centuries ago.

So far, current participants in the Mini-Loan Program are happy with how it is unfolding.

Kearns is seeing steady growth in numbers at St. Michael.

"Three loans went through in 2020, and a fourth is in the pipeline, ready to go to the bank," he said. "Ballpark, we could be looking at another four to five loans this year and \$12,000 in outstanding loans by the end of the year."

"The program has gone as smooth as can be," said Barzel.

Borrowers are grateful.

For one borrower, a mini-loan helped defray the cost of an expensive item needed to improve the quality of daily life.

The loan recipient, who asked to remain anonymous, said, "This is a very good way to help people. The SVDP was so supportive during the loan process. The way they navigate through the process makes life so easy for the person struggling. They treat the SVDP-borrower relationship as a partnership, where they are helping a friend, not a client."

Catholic conferences confront scourge of payday lending

MARK PATTISON
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — It has been well documented over the past year that a fairly large percentage of Americans cannot afford a \$400 emergency expense. This makes them the perfect target of payday lenders.

Under the terms used by payday lenders — some call them "predatory lenders" — in many areas of the country, someone who's strapped for cash takes out a small loan. The lender charges, say, 10% interest. Not that bad, you may think. But that 10% rate is not per year, but per week. When the loan comes due in a couple weeks' time, the borrower cannot pay it all back, and so must take out another loan.

The typical borrower gets 10 loans every

year, and pays back in interest far, far more than the cost of the original loan.

'Big industry'

Some state Catholic conferences have taken steps to blunt the impact of payday lending in their states.

The Catholic Conference of Illinois had some unexpected help from the coronavirus pandemic, which shortened the legislative session, according to Marilou Gervacio, its director of social services and social justice. There were 23 states, plus Puerto Rico, which had payday lending bills introduced in 2020, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures; Illinois led with seven separate measures submitted for consideration.

The issue has been on its radar even before Gervacio started working for the state Catholic conference in 2003; the executive director, Bob Gilligan, had Gervacio's job when she started working there and it was in his portfolio.

"I see a lot of payday lending stores in Chicago, where I live," Gervacio told Catholic News Service in a phone interview. "A lot of them are in areas where there are lower-income residents. In terms of payday lending, we've done a good job in terms of reforming it and limiting it, but it's still a pretty big industry out there."

As of late, a close relative of the payday loan — the car title loan — has been "more of our focus," she added. "When we address pred-

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Like God, Church rejects sin, loves the sinner

GUEST COMMENTARY

RICHARD DOERFLINGER
CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

The Catholic Church has dealt a blow to LGBTQ worshippers hoping for a more liberal, progressive Church.”

So says NBC News about a recent statement by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

What was this terrible blow? The congregation, with Pope Francis' approval, reaffirmed that the Church does not “have the power” to bless same-sex unions — or any relationship involving sexual activity outside of marriage, “the indissoluble union of a man and a woman open in itself to the transmission of life.”

The Church cannot change its teaching for self-styled “liberals” or “conservatives,” as it must serve the designs of God found in Scripture and fully revealed by Christ.

The statement also recognized that same-sex relationships may have “positive elements” to be valued, although they exist “within the context of a union not ordered

to the Creator's plan.” It said the Church should welcome such people with respect and compassion, opposing all unjust discrimination.

Priests may even bless “individual persons with homosexual inclinations, who manifest the will to live in fidelity to the revealed plans of God proposed by Church teaching.” In fact, “God himself never ceases to bless each of his pilgrim people in this world,” because “we are more important to God than all of the sins that we can commit.”

In other words, God rejects sin but loves the sinner, and the Church must do likewise. Or as an accompanying commentary says, “the negative judgment on the blessing of unions of persons of the same sex does not imply a judgment on persons.”

All this was lost on NBC News — and on its guest Francis DeBernardo, executive director of New Ways Ministry. He had said in October that comments by Pope Francis on gay people would be a “tidal wave” sweeping away the Church's past teaching and practice. He now says that Francis has

only approved the new statement under “pressure” from the Vatican, apparently ignoring who runs the Vatican.

What Francis had said, in a documentary, was: “Homosexual people have the right to be in a family. They are children of God. ... Nobody should be thrown out or made miserable over it.” Some decided to interpret him as saying that same-sex unions create families, but he was recognizing people's need to keep receiving love and understanding from their own families.

That documentary also took out of context a position Francis has held since he was archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina, when lawmakers were moving forward with same-sex marriage legislation: A law allowing “civil unions,” recognizing certain legal rights for people in non-marital relationships, is preferable to a law confusing those relationships with marriage.

Then-Archbishop William J. Levada of San Francisco had taken a similar position shortly before Pope Benedict XVI

named him to lead the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and made him a cardinal.

But Francis has also written that “there are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and family” (“Amoris Laetitia,” No. 251) — perhaps the least pastoral-sounding quote in the new Vatican statement.

Some say LGBTQ people and those who love them will leave the Church over its teaching. That would be a tragedy, especially if it arises from a false and cynical narrative by activists trying to divide the Church.

Catholics would be leaving a sanctuary of God's mercy and forgiveness to face a secular culture with its own strict orthodoxy and punishments — including the blacklisting of books, careers and reputations, and no mercy at all.

Doerflinger worked for 36 years in the Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. He writes from Washington state.

We are already blessed — with or without the Church

I'll never forget hearing Pope Francis saying eight years ago, “If a person is gay and seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge?” That moment was monumental for me and led me back to the Church.

A few years ago, friends guided me and my fiancé to St. Michael Parish, Glen Allen. That's when, for the first time in our lives, we found a welcoming, loving and inclusive parish to call home. St. Michael's has brought us so much joy and happiness after decades of alienation, disappointment and heartache from the Catholic Church.

This rekindled faith in Catholicism led us to creating a beautiful image in our head that we would one day baptize our children and attend Church as a family. We also planned to ask a priest to bless our marriage and, if we could, enroll in pre-Cana.

That beautiful stained glass image we recreated was shattered by the Vatican and Pope Francis' March 15 declaration that priests cannot bless same-sex unions and that such blessings are not valid. This reaffirms that the Church hasn't made any progress

towards welcoming and including the LGBTQ+ community. Perhaps it never will.

However, we do know from Scripture that all people are created in the likeness of Jesus, and we all have equal human dignity in his eyes. That's more important to us than what any person on earth thinks. This fall, I'm marrying the man of my dreams, surrounded by the love and support of our family and friends. When we picture that day, we know we're already blessed — with or without the Catholic Church.

— Aaron Jay Ledesma
Richmond

Clarification about girls in Scouting

In a letter (Catholic Virginian, March 22) pertaining to girls now participating in Scouting, the author voiced a concern of “integration of women into a traditionally male group.” Clarification is in order.

First of all, there are three “aims” of Scouting: to promote citizenship, improve physical fitness and develop personal character/leadership. These are human elements — neither male nor female. To allow girls to partici-

pate in Scouting does not negatively affect anyone's achievement or pursuit of these purposes.

Second, it must be understood that Scouting is not suddenly co-ed with boys and girls intermingled like they are in English class. Scout troops are chartered and organized by male and female groups. Females will have their own activities, meetings, camping trips and gatherings separately from all-male troops. In short, “integration” is not the goal.

As a parent of two male Eagle Scouts and scoutmaster of a troop, I can personally attest to the value of the Scouting program. I have witnessed female Scouts who have attended summer camp, participated in fundraisers and represented the very best of what Scouting can offer. Their example has been completely impressive.

Female Scouts I have met did not choose Scouting in pursuit of recognition or publicity, but have pursued the aims of Scouting, the Scout Oath and Scout Law for their own value and merit. These girls are striving to become the best “version of themselves,” which God calls us

each to pursue with tenacity and vigor.

— Stephen Feher
Scoutmaster, Troop 1893B
Midlothian

'Eucharistic coherence' is modern 'clergyspeak'

Archbishop Gomez's term “eucharistic coherence” (Catholic Virginian,

March 8) seems to have been inspired by George Orwell's novel “1984.” Like “newspeak” and “double-speak,” this term can be applied anywhere and to anything desired.

One such application is the catchphrase “Catholic president” to Joe Biden.

See Letters, Page 12

CV letters policy

The Catholic Virginian welcomes signed letters to the editor that can be considered for publication *and/or* posting on The Catholic Virginian website. Submissions should be no more than 270 words and include the writer's name, address or email, and phone number as all submissions are acknowledged. At the editor's discretion, submitter's name may be withheld from publication/posting. Letters should address topics reported in The CV or other topics relevant to Catholics. Personal attacks are not published. Letters may be edited for style, length or content. Opinions expressed by letter writers do not necessarily reflect those of The Catholic Virginian or the Diocese of Richmond.

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Priests of the Diocese of Richmond concelebrate the Chrism Mass with Bishop Barry C. Knestout, Monday evening, March 29, in the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart. Per COVID guidelines, all in attendance were socially distant and masked during the celebration. The 2020 Chrism Mass was not celebrated until Friday, July 10 due to the pandemic. (Photo/Michael Mickle)



During the Mass, Bishop Barry C. Knestout mixes balsam with sacred chrism prior to blessing the oil of the sick and oil of catechumens, and consecrating the chrism. (Photo/Michael Mickle)

Judge strikes down DC's limits on houses of worship

Archdiocese cited First Amendment, Religious Freedom Restoration Act

MARK ZIMMERMANN
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia in a March 25 ruling struck down the District of Columbia's COVID-19 pandemic limits on attendance at houses of worship — set at 25% capacity or 250 worshippers, whichever is less.

The ruling by Judge Trevor N. McFadden was effective immediately, meaning houses of worship are no longer bound by caps on congregation size.

The ruling noted that with Holy Week and Easter approaching, the Catholic archbishop of Washington sought emergency relief from

these regulations under the First Amendment and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

“The District contends that its restrictions on houses of worship are lawful and indeed necessary to fight the COVID-19 pandemic,” McFadden wrote. “Though the court acknowledges the District’s interest in stemming the spread of the virus, it finds that the archdiocese is entitled to relief.”

The Archdiocese of Washington said in a statement: “We are pleased with the court’s ruling that the District’s 25% (or) 250-person capacity limits on religious services are unconstitutional as applied to Catholic churches in the District of Columbia.”

“This ruling enables us to make the sacraments more fully available to our faithful in time for Holy Week, Easter and beyond,” it said. “In our Catholic churches, we will continue to abide by our own safety protocols of social distancing, masking, cleaning and other safety precautions to ensure safe access to worship while we also continue to broadcast our worship services online.”

In a March 26 email to priests in the archdiocese, Father Daniel Carson, vicar general and moderator of the curia, noted McFadden’s ruling was effective immediately and “our churches in the District are no longer bound by either

See Archdiocese, Page 13

In Recognition of Child Abuse Prevention Month

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led by Bishop Barry C. Knestout

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An Initiative of the Office of Safe Environment

Homilies are to be based upon Scripture readings



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
FATHER KENNETH DOYLE
CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

Q. We have a new pastor who is a fine and holy man, but his preaching on Sunday rarely ever mentions the Scriptures that have just been proclaimed. He does catechetical series on things like understanding the parts of the Mass, the liturgical year, our patron saint — as well as other topics that might be interesting to people who are new to Catholicism but are uninspiring to us who learned these basic lessons years ago.

I thought that a homily was supposed to help us “break open the word of God.” Am I wrong that Vatican II asked that priests and deacons preach homilies and not sermons? I try to read a Sunday reflection before coming to Mass, but I feel cheated when beautiful Scriptures are brushed aside in favor of a catechism lesson. (City and state withheld)

A. The reflection known as the homily is so integral to the celebration of the Mass that the Code of Canon Law requires that one be preached on Sundays and holy days of obligation and encourages it at every celebration of the Eucharist (No. 767).

I agree with you: The homily

should regularly be based on the scriptural readings for that day’s Mass. That’s not just my idea, but it accords with the direction offered in official Church documents.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal — the Church’s “guidebook” on the celebration of the liturgy — says that the homily “should be an explanation of some aspect of the readings from sacred Scripture or of another text from the Ordinary or Proper of the Mass of the day and should take into account both the mystery being celebrated and the particular needs of the listeners” (No. 65).

In 2012, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a document on the Sunday homily titled “Preaching the Mystery of Faith.”

In that document, in a section called “The Biblical Foundations for the Church’s Preaching Ministry,” the bishops noted: “This very integration of the homily into the texture of the liturgy warrants the use of the Lectionary readings as the basis for the homily.”

There might well be other opportunities for a catechetical series — perhaps a classroom setting after Mass — but that sort of “instruction” should not serve as a regular replacement for the homilist’s reflections on the word of God.

Q. At my death, I would like to donate my body to the local

medical school for their continued research and training of students. Is this allowed in the Catholic Church? (Kailua, Hawaii)

A. Yes, it is allowed — but with certain cautions. The Catholic Church teaches that it is permissible and even laudable to donate one’s body to scientific research after death. The intent is to enable others to live longer if any viable organs can be used — or to provide the material for research that might prevent disease in the future.

In October 2014, Pope Francis met with the Transplantation Committee for the Council of Europe and called the act of organ donation “a testimony of love for our neighbor.” That same perspective is reflected in the U.S. Catholic bishops’ Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services:

“Catholic health care institutions should encourage and provide the means whereby those who wish to do so may arrange for the donation of their organs and bodily tissue, for ethically legitimate purposes, so that they may be used for donation and research after death” (No. 63).

Medical students can learn from research on cadavers to become healers of other human bodies. One caution was expressed by St. John Paul II in a 1991 address to participants in a conference on organ transplants.

He said: “The body cannot be treated as a mere physical or biological entity, nor can its organs and tissues ever be used as items for sale or exchange.”

Another caution is that, at the conclusion of their use for research, bodily remains should be treated with respect and properly entombed or buried.

Q. Were the apostles baptized? (Indianapolis)

A. There is nothing in the Scriptures that describes the apostles having been baptized by Jesus — but of course the Gospels provide only the broad outlines of the public life of Christ and not every detail.

It would be safe to assume that Jesus did baptize the Twelve. Just before his ascension, Jesus makes it clear that baptism is a basic part of becoming his disciple; in the final words of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus commissions the apostles to “go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

In John’s Gospel (3:22), we read that, “after this, Jesus and his disciples went into the region of Judea, where he spent some time with them baptizing.”

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

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In hide-and-seek, God doesn't stop looking for us



IN LIGHT OF FAITH

BARBARA HUGHES

One of the games our granddaughter delights in playing is hide-and-seek. She loves being the one who's hiding, and when she's found, squeals of delight erupt, suggesting that no matter how well she tries to hide, the fun really begins when she's found as we wrap our (pre-COVID) arms around her.

There are times when it seems as if God also likes playing hide-and-seek, and nothing delights him more than when people who are searching to find themselves discover they can only do so when they find God. The reason is that God never stops seeking us.

At no time in the liturgical cycle is this more apparent than during the post-resurrection stories. No sooner does Jesus appear than it seems he disappears, but not before offering some rather cryptic words.

His cautionary warning to Mary Magdalene when she tried to reach out to him signaled a change. His words — "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (Jn 20:17). — were unexpected.

It may seem as if the previous intimacy between Jesus and his closest friends has changed, but nothing could be further from the truth. Before his death and resurrection, Jesus addressed the apostles by calling them friends; now

he referred to them as brothers. They were more than friends; they were family.

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus assumed the appearance of just another traveler, that is until he revealed himself in the breaking of the bread, only to disappear again.

Throughout the first chapters of Acts of the Apostles, Jesus' appearances seem to take those who see him by surprise. He appeared in the upper room to the apostles, who were hiding behind closed doors, revealed himself to some women on their way to the tomb and turned up on the beach where he was fixing breakfast for a few disciples who were returning from a night of fishing.

After the resurrection, there was something very different about Jesus. His comings and goings took on a mystical quality. He was gradually weaning his followers from depending on their senses to seeking and finding him through faith.

Knowing that he would be leaving them soon, Jesus' appearances reassured his followers that he was alive, but soon they would have to depend on faith to see them through their journey.

When Jesus told Thomas, "Blessed are they who do not see but believe," he had in mind people throughout the ages who would follow him despite never having seen him in the flesh. He had in mind people like you and me and everyone who believes without having to see.

Jesus' death and resurrection won for us the privilege of participating in his life through grace, and as St. Paul was told when he asked that his struggle be removed, "My grace is enough for you, for it is in weakness that power reaches perfection" (2 Cor. 12:9).

Jesus never promised to take away suffering, but he did assure us that the grace needed to remain faithful was ours for the asking. Grace is not some kind of fairy dust that God sprinkles over us. Grace resides in us and all around us. If we believe that grace is the self-revelation of God, then grace is present in the people and events of our lives, and all who seek God shall find him.

As Guigo, a 12th century Carthusian monk, wrote: "Seek in reading and you will find in meditating, knock in mental prayer and it will be opened to you in contemplation" (CCC: 2642). His advice suggests that all who seek God will find him.

It may well be that God enjoys playing hide-and-seek with us. Yet, knowing how easily our attention strays, Jesus has left plenty of clues and places where we can find him. His presence in Word and Sacrament are primary, but his presence is also revealed in the beauty of nature, a child's smile, the embrace of a loved one and in the homeless person we encounter.

Just as Mary Magdalene recognized Jesus when he called her by name, so Jesus has called each of us by name and promised: "ask and you shall receive, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you" (Lk 11:9).

If you haven't found Jesus, it may be that you've stopped searching. If that's the case, there's no better time to continue where you may have left off. Jesus wants to be found so that he can wrap his arms around you.

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

Why Easter 2025 will be key date for Christian unity



BELIEVE AS YOU PRAY

MSGR. TIMOTHY KEENEY

Mark your calendars. There is a very important anniversary on our horizon, and it could have a profound effect on Christian unity. June 13, 2025, will mark the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea.

Why would this anniversary be so important, and what does it have to do with today's readings?

The Council of Nicaea was called precisely to foster greater unity of belief regarding the nature of Christ. As part of that council, and as a concrete expression of the unity among all Christians, a common date for Easter was set — the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox.

In the centuries since the Nicaean Council, the unity of Christians has fractured. That disunity has even affected the date for the celebration of Easter.

Catholics and Protestants celebrated Easter last week, and we are completing the celebration of that day with the ending of the Octave of Easter this Sunday. For a variety of reasons too complicated to go into here, many of our Orthodox brothers and sister are still in the midst of their Lenten journey and will not celebrate Easter until May 2.

Through the years, there has been a desire among the Orthodox for the re-establishment of a common date for Easter as a visible sign of unity among Christians. Since the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church has indicated that it would favor restoration of a common date for Easter so long as our brothers and sisters not in union with Rome would accept this change as well.

The most likely proposal to be accepted is that we would keep the Nicaean formula for determining the date of Easter, but that the date of the spring equinox would be determined from the geographical location of Jerusalem, since the equinox can fluctuate between March 19 through March 21 depending on your location on the globe.

Steps are being taken at the World Council of Churches to make this a reality for Easter 2025. It may seem a small thing, but it would be a major step toward Christian unity for all Christians to celebrate our greatest feast on the same day.

On this second Sunday of Easter, it is fitting that we should give thanks for any concrete steps towards Christian unity. Today we remember the witness of the unity of Christians in the first community of the faithful in Jerusalem. That witness powerfully drew many to belief in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Conversely, we need to be called to repentance that our disunity has caused damage to the credibility of the Gospel we are charged to preach. The Acts of the Apostles gives us the

vision of a community of believers one in heart and mind, and that this unity had concrete consequences for the manner of their life and their care of the poor.

This unity of life and love is also expressed in our second reading from the First Letter of John. It helps us to understand that there is a triangular relationship between our love of God the Father, our love for Jesus Christ and our love for the children of God. There can be no separation between the three:

"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten by God, and everyone who loves the Father loves also the one begotten by him. In this way we know that we love the children of God when we love God and obey his commandments" (1 Jn 5:1-2).

Because all of those who are begotten by him include all of our Christian brothers and sisters whether we are in union with them or not, we have an obligation to foster and restore that unity wherever possible.

My prayer is that this Easter's call for unity among the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ might bring us closer to that day when we more perfectly resemble in fact the post-Easter apostolic community.

Through our prayer, our concrete actions of simplicity and charity and, yes, even our common celebration of the date of Easter, we might be effective witnesses in calling all the nations to belief in our Risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Msgr. Timothy Keeney is pastor of Incarnation, Charlottesville.

Second Sunday of Easter

Acts 4:32-35;

Ps 118: 2-4, 13-15, 22-24;

1 Jn 5:1-6;

Jn 20:19-31

IN MEMORIAM

Xaverian Brother Harold "Harry" Eccles



A Christian Burial Service was celebrated for Xaverian Brother Harold "Harry" Eccles, Monday, March 15, in the chapel of St. Xavier High School in Louisville. Brother Harry, 93, passed away Monday, March 8, at Nazareth Nursing Home in Louisville, his hometown. At the time of his death, he was the oldest Xaverian Brother at age 93, with 76 years of service as a Xaverian brother.

After completing his initial formation and education with the Xaverian brothers, he taught religion and English at their high schools in Massachusetts, Maryland, New York and Kentucky.

In 1979, Brother Harry was the founding director of the Volunteer Ministries Community in the Diocese of Richmond. For 10 years, he lived with and mentored groups of recent college graduates who volunteered for a year of ministry service in rural Virginia. The focus of the ministry was presence and service.

In addition to the community he established at Blackstone, Xaverian brothers also established volunteer communities in Staunton and Harrisonburg.

In 1989, with encouragement from Bishop Walter F. Sullivan, Brother Harry began ministerial outreach to Haiti. Under the guidance of the Xaverian Volunteer program, he accepted groups of college graduates who wished to serve in Haiti.

Besides mentoring the volunteers, Brother Harry taught English at the local high school, as well as to older men in the community. He also accompanied the 12 men living at Sant Zaveryn to Port au Prince where they, with the support of the Xaverian community, were completing their university studies.

According to the obituary provided by the Xaverians, "Thanks to (Brother Harry's) faithful service and the generosity of the congregation, Haiti is now gifted with doctors, teachers, accountants and spiritually and socially sensitive citizens whose task is transforming Haiti to a more just and educate country."

IN MEMORIAM

Benedictine Abbot Benedict McDermott



A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated Saturday, March 27, at Mary, Mother of the Church Abbey, Richmond, for Benedictine Abbot Benedict McDermott, a monk of Mary, Mother of the Church Abbey. Abbot Benedict, 87, died on Friday, March 19.

The ninth of Alvina and John McDermott's 13 children, Raymond (Ray) joined the monks of Belmont Abbey where he was given the name Benedict. He made his first profession of vows in 1955 and was ordained in 1961. The following year, he was assigned to St. Benedict's Priory and to the faculty of Benedictine High School in Richmond. He was pastor of St. Benedict Parish in the early '70s while continuing to teach French at the high school.

Abbot Benedict was elected as the first abbot of Mary, Mother of the Church Abbey when it became an independent abbey in 1989. During his administration, he oversaw the purchase of 50 acres in Goochland County and the move of the monastery to that site. He was re-elected abbot by his fellow monks in 1999 but resigned the position three years later due to health issues.

Memorial contributions may be made to the New Monastery Fund for Mary, Mother of the Church Abbey, 12829 River Road, Richmond, 23238.

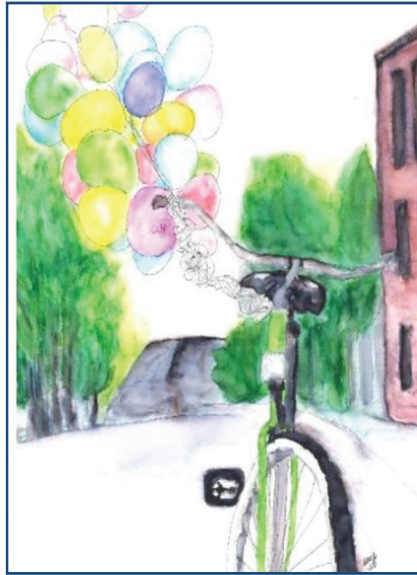
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Director

Continued from Page 1

have gone through...," she said. "That really is upsetting because there are so many incidents that could have been avoided."

While learning what had occurred, Shafi also learned the value of what the diocese has done in recent years to protect children.

"I feel like we are in a good place right now, we have made some progress, we've put so many good measures in place for accountability," she said, adding that none of the cases she read were recent. "So that gives you some reassurance that we are in a good place. We are providing that nurturing environment for children."

'Why we do what we do'

One of the changes Shafi has implemented in the Office of Safe Environment is how information is disseminated. Rather than one webinar that all parishes and schools were invited to attend but at which attendance was poor, she has taken a different approach.

"We work hard here, and there's a real reason why we do what we do, making sure that we have these safe environments throughout the diocese," she said. "So, I said we wanted to contact each parish and each school and speak to them individually so that we know what they are doing, and they know what we are doing."

Since January, her office has met with 55 parishes and schools.

"We tell them the safe environment initiatives and tell them about our program, and then we also do their compliance check with them as well," she said, adding that participants are free to ask questions so that her office can address concerns that arise.

She said no one can say "We didn't know" when it comes to compliance expectations because these are addressed in each parish and school meeting.

"We're just making sure they understand what the requirements are," Shafi said of time invested to conduct each Zoom meeting. "It is totally worth it because we feel confident after that that they know what to do and they're making those changes. And then we're ready for the audit."

Shafi considers safe environment part of the "fabric of the Church."

"That's how we introduce it when we do the forums. I tell them, 'This is our ministry. This is our work. This is what we do, and the reason why we do it, this is why it's so important,'" she said.

Although not required by the USCCB, Shafi encourages parishes and schools to have a safe environment committee.

"I tell them It's not a requirement, but it's highly recommended because when you have a group of people — this could be staff and volunteers, parishioners altogether — and they focus on your safe environment issues around your parish and they look at the programs that you're running, those are the key people that will highlight areas of concerns to you," she said.

Training teen volunteers

Shafi has also developed a training program for teens who volunteer to work with children in their parishes.

"We really like the fact that they come forward and they want to help. We don't want to turn them away, but we want to protect them whilst they're working with us," she said. "This teens' program is really to help them understand boundaries, what is a healthy relationship, what is a safe touch."

Shafi said that when youth volunteer, they are there to assist the adult supervisor but not to supervise a group of children.

"Sometimes in parishes, we do that. We say, 'OK, this 15-year-old can take care of this group of children,' and it's not right. They're

children themselves," she said. "So, if they see something that is inappropriate, then we are giving them the tools of how they need to report that through this training program."

Concern for children

Born in England and raised in a Catholic home and educated in a Catholic school, volunteering was natural for her.

"I was always a volunteer in parishes. That was my thing. I'd always have a regular job, and I would always volunteer to help out. For some reason, my concern was always with children, with the youth," she said, noting she formed the youth group and led the sacramental program.

When she came to New York in 2007 and joined St. Ignatius of Loyola Parish, she volunteered to help and was put into religious education and human services.

"That was just my calling, she said. "I just was always wanting to do something to help and serve the community."

She continues to volunteer at St. Michael the Archangel Parish, Glen Allen, where she, her husband Jamshed and their children, Sania, 9, and Aiden, 7, are members, and where she is a member of the parish's newly formed intercultural council.

Having been called by God to head the Office of Safe Environment, Shafi relies on prayer to sustain her in her ministry.

"I am spiritually focused through the Blessed Mother. I pray the rosary for this purpose, and it just gives me so much strength, especially as I'm driving in," she said. "And when I say, 'The Descent of the Holy Spirit' in the Glorious Mysteries, that just fills me up with that energy to carry on with that day."

In addition to being the director of the Office of Safe Environment, Shafi became the diocesan coordinator for women religious in February. In that position, she interacts with and supports religious sisters residing and ministering in the diocese.

Change

Continued from Page 1

change and to change their lifestyles to help mitigate some of its effects.

"The climate crisis has been unfolding since the Industrial Revolution," Pope Francis wrote. "For a long time, it developed so slowly that it remained imperceptible except to a very few clairvoyants."

"Even now it is uneven in its impact: climate change happens everywhere, but the greatest pain is felt by those who have contributed the least to it," the pope wrote. "The huge and increasing numbers (of people) displaced by climate crises are fast becoming a great emergency."

According to the document, "In the course of 2019 alone, more than 33 million people were newly displaced, bringing the total number to almost 51 million, the highest number ever recorded; and of these, 8.5 million (were displaced) as a result

of conflict and violence and 24.9 million due to natural disasters."

"In the first half of 2020, 14.6 million new displacements were recorded; 9.8 million as a result of disasters and 4.8 million associated with conflict and violence," the document said, citing statistics from the Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Center.

In addition, it said, climate change is "a threat multiplier, intensifying existing conflicts where resources are scarce."

'Witnessing Church'

Responding to the needs of people displaced within their home countries or forced to migrate because of climate-related catastrophes is "at the heart of being a credible and witnessing Church, a caring and inclusive ecclesial community," the document said.

Many people either do not know about the human cost of climate change or refuse to believe it, the text said. "Blindness about these issues is widespread

and its causes are mainly: a) plain ignorance; b) indifference and selfishness vis-à-vis phenomena that endanger the common good; c) the purposeful denial of reality to protect vested interests; d) misunderstanding."

"God gives the means to see, but human beings must be willing to journey from blindness to awareness," the document said, which is why many of the suggestions in the text involve education at all levels of the Church, ecumenical and interreligious cooperation in sensitizing people to the issues and in responding to the needs of people displaced by climate crises and listening to and advocating for the real needs of displaced people and those threatened with displacement.

'Obligation to earth, others'

Presenting the document during an online news conference March 30, Salesian Father Joshtrom Kureethadam, an official at the dicastery, said, "Climate crisis and other eco-

logical hazards are becoming the primary drivers for displacement, and could re-shape patterns of migration in the coming decades."

The crisis, he said, "is ultimately a moral problem. The poor and vulnerable communities whose carbon emissions are only a fraction of those of the rich world are already the early and disproportionate victims of the crisis."

Asked to clarify the moral teaching behind the document, Cardinal Michael Czerny, undersecretary for migrants and refugees, said, "I don't think the moral argument needs to be any more complex" than that all human beings were created by God, are brothers and sisters to each other and are living on the same planet. They have an obligation to each other and to the earth.

"We really seem to be at the point of deciding, actively or passively, whether we will take care of the one home we have or we destroy it," the cardinal said.

Letters

Continued from Page 6

According to most moral, political and social criteria, Joe Biden is an apostate Catholic, not a Catholic Christian president. His promotion of "abortion on demand" and the repeal of the Hyde Amendment would indicate this.

The Declaration of Independence has the words "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Have the Catholic bishops not noticed that there is no liberty, no pursuit of happiness and no need of various social/political deliverances for the baby if it is murdered in the womb or at birth?

Catholic bishops use the blanket term "systemic racism" to generate social-political leverage on — and artificial guilt in — the white-skinned laity. Political and social profit then comes from appearing to be sincere and compassionate.

"Eucharistic coherence" joins "systematic racism" as modern "clergyspeak" put forth to ignore Biden's "abortion on demand" policies so that politically correct, progressive Democrat speaking points can be parroted and advocated.

The Bible would deny such foolishness. Its message is: "Be for Christ or against Christ; be lukewarm and you will be vomited out."

Be a pro-life Christian or be an indifferent-to-life Democrat. However, we cannot be both. Not this time. Not anymore.

— Robert J. Mack Hampton

Directives hamper parish's meal ministry

For nine years, my family has cooked meals for the homeless families staying at our parish with Family Promise. When the pandemic hit, we were glad that organization found ways to serve those

families in our area. We deliver home-cooked meals to coolers outside their doors.

The same cannot be said of a similar ministry I am involved in at my parish due to diocesan directives. We are not allowed to deliver home-cooked meals to our sick brothers and sisters in Christ and can only mail gift cards to them. This impersonal approach takes away from our call to enter into one another's crosses in charity and serve one another.

When there is so much isolation, loneliness, fear and strife, why do we seem to lack supernatural faith? Why so much emphasis on liability over and above our call to love and serve others?

Why can we pick up a burger at a restaur-

ant, but not deliver a home-cooked meal that offers a personal touch to someone undergoing a major affliction? Are we not the Body of Christ who is called not to fear, but to trust in our crucified and glorified Savior who has conquered sin and death — the very same Savior who ministered to the sick and afflicted above all else and who calls us to do the same?

People are starving for bold, supernatural faith during these dark days. Now is the time to be a light to the world. How can we be that light if we cannot even cook a nice meal for someone in need and drop it off on their porch?

— Constance T. Hull Roanoke


Praying for an end to abortion



Participants in 40 Days for Life pray at the driveway leading into the Planned Parenthood clinic at 201 N. Hamilton St., Richmond, on Thursday, March 25. The 27th vigil at that location ran from Feb. 17 through March 28. (Photo/Whitten Cluff)



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Predators

Continued from Page 5

atory lending, there's been no cap on interest rates" for car title loans, Gervacio said, and reforms are needed to "make them fair to the consumer."

'Terrible cycle of debt'

In Michigan, the state House passed a bill easing prior restrictions on payday lenders, according to Tom Hickson, vice president for public policy and advocacy for the Michigan Catholic Conference.

"They brought it over to the Senate, and we killed it in committee," Hickson said, "Boy, we had a really strong effort on the Senate side. A lot of Catholic members over there, I figure they didn't listen to the song and dance" of the payday lending lobby.

Those who seek help from payday lenders wind up in "a terrible cycle of debt," Hickson said. "The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau — federal data — showed that 70% of people take out a new loan within a day of paying back" the original loan, while 90% of borrowers seek a new loan within 30 days.

Given that the annual percentage rates for these loans can easily top 400%, "it turns out they make 75% of their money on people who borrow 10 times a year or more," he said.

Hickson shot down some of the arguments touted by payday lending advocates. "We're serving a need. We're helping the unbanked. We help people. The truth is you have to have a checking account to get a loan," he said.

More than fighting off the lure of payday lenders, the Michigan Catholic Conference published a one-page fact sheet with several alternative sources for small loans. Some familiar names on the fact sheet included Bank of America, Habitat for Humanity and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Every lender offered annual percentage rates of under 25%, with some under 10%.

"The Bank of America, that was a surprise to me," Hickson said, adding that the state Catholic conference worked with the Vincentians in the Diocese of Lansing to establish its microloan program — a 3% interest rate for loans of up to \$750. "It's meant to teach financial literacy," he said.

A half-dozen credit unions in the state were listed by name on the fact sheet for their skill in offering small loans. "During the pandemic, Michigan credit unions made nearly 9,500 emergency cash loans, covering more than \$22.5 million," the fact sheet said.

Combating 400% interest

In Nebraska, the state's Catholic conference worked independently of a coalition that achieved a stunning 83%-17% victory at the polls in November to cap the annual percentage rate for loans of any kind at 36%. It became the 19th state, plus the District of Columbia, to either outright ban payday lending or to cap interest rates so low that it is not a profitable business.

Nebraska was no stranger to triple-digit interest rates, according to Tom Venzor, executive director of the Nebraska Catholic Conference. Before the cap was enacted by voters, "lenders were basically able to charge up to 461% APR (annual percentage rate) on a \$425 loan," he said "From our figures, the average borrower was being charged just north of 400% on basically \$250 loans, and getting trapped into 10 loans a year."

The state Catholic conference focused its efforts on Catholic newspapers and radio as well as social media. An Omaha archdiocesan priest, Venzor said, was on the board of Nebraskans for Responsible Lending, which spearheaded the statewide campaign.

"People get it," Venzor told CNS. "They know what it's like to take out a mortgage. They would never pay 400%, 200%, 100% interest."

Richmond food distribution



Diversity Richmond held a food drive in partnership with Sacred Heart Community Center, Richmond, Thursday, March 18, during which volunteers boxed and distributed 15 tons of food for hundreds of families, according to organizers. Distribution took place at the Sacred Heart Community Center. (Photo/James Millner)

Archdiocese

Continued from Page 7

the 25% or the 250-person capacity limit."

Father Carson told the priests that the archdiocese's guidelines for the public celebration of Mass during the pandemic, first issued in May 2020 and updated that October, remain in effect.

Those guidelines require strict safety protocols, including mandatory social distancing, mandatory mask wearing, hand sanitizing upon entering the church, and for pews and other church surfaces to be regularly and thoroughly disinfected.

His email included a link to D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser's March 17 executive order, which extends her declaration of a public health emergency through May 20.

In its section on places of worship, Bowser's order — besides including the now-struck down capacity limits of 25% or 250 worshippers — also encourages virtual services, especially for those who have not yet been fully vaccinated; requires that places of worship must use a reservation system or other means to ensure there will not be crowding; and says household members may be seated as a group, but each group must be at least 6 feet apart from others.

Father Carson's email pointed out that "the District's requirements include no crowding inside or outside of churches, cooperation in the District's contact tracing efforts, masking, social distancing, wellness checks for Mass leaders and other health and safety protocols that are consistent with the archdiocese's own guidelines."

In a Dec. 16 executive order, Bowser modified her earlier cap of allowing only 50 people at churches to 25% or 250 people

and established those same limits for other businesses and venues. The modification followed the settlement of an earlier lawsuit brought by the archdiocese over a 50-person cap.

In mid-February, the Archdiocese of Washington asked the District of Columbia to revisit its 25% or 250-person limit on houses of worship, but the District declined, so the archdiocese petitioned the District Court to remove the cap.

Considering Holy Week and Easter would be fast approaching, "we asked to be treated on par with big box stores, supermarkets, and other essential businesses, and we have proven that we can worship in a safe and responsible manner," said Chris Anzidei, the archdiocese's general counsel.

In his ruling, McFadden wrote that the District's capacity restrictions "discriminate against houses of worship" and that "the District's restrictions substantially burden the archdiocese's religious exercise."

He said the court "finds the 250-person cap particularly troubling."

"It does not appear that this restriction was narrowly tailored to stem the tide of the virus. As the District's order shows, it was designed simply to ensure 'parity' between houses of worship and restaurants," McFadden said.

The District also admitted during oral arguments that "there have been no reported outbreaks from attendance at the archdiocese's Masses," the judge said.

McFadden also noted the archdiocese has self-imposed restrictions beyond what the District has required and continues to adhere to "extensive precautions" to safeguard congregants and limit the size of gatherings.

Read additional Catholic news and information daily at www.catholicvirginian.org.

OPPORTUNITIES

Catholic High School has the following openings for the 2021-2022 school year:

English Teacher

Qualifications: Bachelor's degree required; a master's degree and valid teaching experience preferred.

Math Teacher

Qualifications: Bachelor's degree required; a master's degree and experience teaching math at an AP level are preferred.

History/Social Sciences Teacher

Qualifications: Bachelor's degree required; a master's degree and valid teaching experience preferred.

For any of these positions, the applicant must have a current Virginia teaching license with endorsements in the assigned subject areas.

Send a cover letter, résumé, diocesan application (found at www.richmonddioocese.org) and references to Mr. Tal Covington, assistant principal, Catholic High School 4552 Princess Anne Road, Virginia Beach, VA 23462 or email materials to covingtont@chsvb.org. The application deadline is Thursday, April 29, 2021, or until the position is filled.

Catholic High School, a college preparatory high school in Virginia Beach, serves the communities of southeastern Hampton Roads. Please visit www.chsvb.org for more information.

Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, West Point, is seeking applicants for the position of coordinator of Christian Formation. The successful applicant must be a practicing Catholic in good standing. This position is responsible for overseeing the faith formation programs for pre-school through adult, sacramental preparation, RCIA and youth ministry. This is a 20 hour per week part-time position with flexible hours to include nights and weekends, available July 1, 2021. Salary is negotiable based upon qualifications and experience. Submit a completed Diocese of Richmond employment application with a cover letter to Father Oscar Paraiso, pastor, Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church, 207 W. Euclid Blvd., West Point, VA 23181 no later than Wednesday, April 14, 2021.

The Diocese of Richmond is accepting applications for a part-time IT technical support specialist. This position will support a number of school and parish locations, providing desktop support to end-users in a Windows 10/Mac environment.

The support specialist will be working with the Microsoft Office Suite, cloud technologies such as Office 365, audio-visual applications and configuration, software installation and configuration and desktop

and printer maintenance. Position is 21 hours per week, Wednesday – Friday, 8:30 a.m.— 4:30 p.m.

Interested candidates should please send a cover letter, résumé and completed Diocese of Richmond Employment Application to jobs@richmonddioocese.org.

St. Ann, Colonial Heights, is seeking a part-time (28 hours per week) coordinator of elementary Christian formation (CECF).

The CECF coordinates Christian formation for children Pre-K to fifth grade. Duties include establishing curricula and calendars, recruiting and training volunteer catechists, implementing first reconciliation and first Eucharist preparation and recruiting and training Vacation Bible School and Children's Liturgy of the Word coordinators. The CECF reports to the Director of Religious Education and the pastor.

Candidate must be a practicing Catholic. Bachelor's degree and one to three years of parish experience preferred, experience working with pre-school and elementary-aged children highly recommended. Must have basic technology skills, interpersonal skills, ability to communicate well orally and in writing.

Please send a résumé and diocesan application to Linda Mingos, 17111 Jefferson Davis Hwy, Colonial Heights, VA 23834 or lmingos@stancc.com.

SHORTTAKES

Join Deacon Charles Williams, director of the Diocese of Richmond's Office for Black Catholics and deacon at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, on a **Pilgrimage to the Holy Land**, Oct. 21-30, 2021, for the most deeply moving spiritual experience of your lifetime. The 10-day tour for \$3,599 includes airfare, hotels, tours, breakfast and dinner, daily Mass in holy places and much more. For further information, 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.

St. Joan of Arc, Yorktown, will celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday, April 11, 3-4 p.m. The program will open with eucharistic adoration and will include the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, a reflection on the message of mercy delivered by Father Michael Joly, readings from Scripture and the Diary of St. Faustina and will conclude with Benediction.

Due to COVID restrictions, seating will be limited. Social distancing and wearing of a mask are required. Congregating indoors before or after the service is not permitted.

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

Accredited: After an 18-month evaluation by the Council on Accreditation (COA), Commonwealth Catholic Charities (CCC) has received another four-year national accreditation. CCC has been COA-accredited since 1997 and is one of only 27 COA-accredited organizations in Virginia.

According to COA's lead reviewer, Connie Mitchell, "The organization is very mission driven and staff are knowledgeable in their roles. This is a rigorous process that ran smoothly and showed the best that Commonwealth Catholic Charities had to offer."

By the numbers: According to a March 26 article in Vatican newspaper L'Osservatore Romano, the worldwide Catholic population at the end of 2019 exceeded 1.34 billion, which continued to be about 17.7% of the world's population. That marked an increase of 16 million Catholics — a 1.12% increase compared to 2018 while the world's population grew by 1.08%. Those numbers were compiled for the Statistical Yearbook of the Church.

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 akrebs@catholicvirginian.org. Include your name and phone number in case we need to follow up. Information cannot be taken over the phone.

Archbishop has paintings donated by mafia boss removed from church

JUNNO AROCHO ESTEVES
Catholic News Service

ROME — Archbishop Domenico Battaglia of Naples ordered the removal from a church of two religious paintings that were donated by a mafia boss who led one of the prominent clans in the Camorra crime syndicate.

In a statement published March 29, the Archdiocese of Naples said Archbishop Battaglia gave the order after he was "recently made aware" of the paintings placed at the entrance of a church in the archdiocese with an inscription that read, "In devotion of Lorenzo Nuvoletta."

The late crime boss led the infamous Nuvoletta clan in the Neapolitan town of Marano di Napoli until his arrest in 1990. He died of liver cancer in 1994 while serving the remainder of his sentence under house arrest.

The archdiocese said the archbishop ordered the removal of the paintings — one depicting Our Lady of the Rosary of

Pompeii and the other St. Rita — to avoid confusing the faithful "with actions that could even remotely be traced back to an ambiguity between the Gospel and life."

The decision by Archbishop Battaglia was meant to "reaffirm the primacy of conscience, enlightened by faith which invites us to love truth and justice" and to "give an unequivocal example of the incompatibility between the paths of the Gospel and those of iniquity at any level."

The archdiocese also said the paintings will be replaced with different images of Our Lady of Pompeii and St. Rita "so that faith may continue to walk with the hearts and legs of those who nourish these healthy devotions."

Archbishop Battaglia's actions are in line with Pope Francis' condemnation of the mafia and its use of religious acts of

Ángelus del Papa: sembrar semillas con ejemplos y no con palabras

Hoy, quinto domingo de Cuaresma, el Papa Francisco ha reflexionado desde la Biblioteca Apostólica sobre el Evangelio del día según san Juan, invitándonos a sembrar semillas de amor “no con palabras que se lleva el viento, sino con ejemplos concretos, sencillos y valientes”.

Mireia Bonilla – Ciudad del Vaticano

El Apóstol Juan hoy relata un episodio que ocurrió en los últimos días de vida de Cristo, poco antes de su Pasión: Mientras Jesús estaba en Jerusalén para la fiesta de pascua, algunos griegos, llenos de curiosidad por lo que estaba haciendo, expresaron su deseo de verlo. Se acercaron al apóstol Felipe y le dijeron: «Queremos ver a Jesús». Felipe se lo dice a Andrés y luego juntos van a decírselo al Maestro. El Papa Francisco, ha asegurado este mediodía antes de rezar la oración mariana del Ángelus, que en la petición de aquellos griegos “se puede ver la súplica que muchos hombres y mujeres, en todo lugar y tiempo, dirigen a la Iglesia y también a cada uno de nosotros: ‘Queremos ver a Jesús’”.

Inmediatamente, el Santo padre ha preguntado: ¿Cómo responde Jesús a esta petición? y ha contestado: “de un modo que lleva a reflexionar. Dice así: «Ha llegado la hora de que sea glorificado el Hijo del hombre [...] Si el grano de trigo no cae en tierra y muere, queda él solo; pero si muere, da mucho fruto»”. Francisco señala que estas palabras “no parecen responder a la petición que habían hecho aquellos griegos” pues en realidad “van más allá”. De hecho, el Papa subraya que “Jesús revela que Él, para todo hombre que quiera buscarlo, es la semilla escondida dispuesta a morir para dar mucho fruto” como diciendo: “si queréis conocerme y comprenderme, mirad el grano de trigo que muere en la tierra, mirad la cruz”.

El crucifijo como “árbol de la vida”

Francisco también se ha parado a reflexio-



El Papa Francisco en la Biblioteca del Palacio Apostólico. (ANSA)

nar sobre el signo de la cruz, recordando que a lo largo de los siglos “se ha convertido en el emblema por excelencia de los cristianos”. De hecho – dice – “quien también hoy quiere “ver a Jesús”, tal vez proveniente de países y culturas donde el cristianismo es poco conocido, ¿qué ve en primer lugar? ¿Cuál es el signo más común que encuentra? El crucifijo”. El Papa explica que el crucifijo lo encontramos en las iglesias, en los hogares de los cristianos, incluso en el propio cuerpo, pero lo más importante es “que el signo sea coherente con el Evangelio: la cruz no puede sino expresar amor, servicio, entrega sin reservas: sólo así es verdaderamente el “árbol de la vida”, de la vida sobreabundante”.

La responsabilidad de los cristianos

“Mucha gente, a menudo sin decirlo implícitamente, quisiera “ver a Jesús”, encontrarlo, conocerlo” continúa el Papa, y es por ello que es importante comprender la gran responsabilidad de los cristianos y de nues-

tras comunidades: “Nosotros también debemos responder con el testimonio de una vida que se entrega en el servicio. De una vida que tome el estilo de Dios, cercanía, compasión, que se dona en el servicio”. Se trata - subraya - “de sembrar semillas de amor no con palabras que se lleva el viento, sino con ejemplos concretos, sencillos y valientes”, “no con condenas de odio sino con gestos de amor”. Francisco asegura que es entonces que el Señor, con su gracia, “nos hace fructificar, incluso cuando el terreno es árido por incomprendimientos, dificultades, persecuciones, pretensiones de legalismos o moralismos”.

Por último, recuerda que es precisamente en la prueba y en la soledad, mientras muere la semilla “que brota la vida para dar fruto maduro en su momento” y es en esta trama de muerte y de vida “que podemos experimentar la alegría y la verdadera fecundidad del amor” y repite una vez más: “que se da según el estilo de Dios: cercanía, compasión y ternura”.

Museos Vaticanos: “El llanto y la Cruz victoriosa”

“Proclamar a Cristo significa mostrar que creer en Él y seguirle no sólo es algo verdadero y correcto, sino también hermoso. El corazón del Evangelio es la belleza del amor salvador de Dios manifestado en Jesucristo muerto y resucitado”. Inspirada en estas palabras de Francisco, continúa la colaboración entre los Museos Vaticanos y Vatican News: las obras maestras de las colecciones papales acompañadas de las palabras de los papas.

En esta tabla, el autor ha representado en el centro la cruz de madera sobre la que se ha consumado el sacrificio del Hijo de Dios, y sobre la que está apoyada la escalera utilizada para el descendimiento del cuerpo de Jesús, acogido en los brazos amorosos de su Madre y de San Juan. A sus pies están otros dos apóstoles y María Magdalena. Detrás de Jesús aparece José de Arimatea, y junto a él, San Pedro, que normalmente no figura en este tipo de

iconografía. En el lado opuesto, se reconoce al fariseo Nicodemo. El momento del “Llanto” surge en el arte cristiano alrededor del s. XII, probablemente inspirado en las meditaciones de los místicos y como recuerdo del uso ritual de las lamentaciones fúnebres que acompañaban los funerales en el Oriente mediterráneo.

“Jesús murió no solo porque nosotros lo matamos; murió por nosotros. Muriendo en la Cruz, Él nos ha salvado. Él padeció y murió por nosotros. Con la liturgia de la Iglesia llamamos “bendita” la cruel Pasión del Señor, porque es fuente de nuestro renacimiento y de nuestra felicidad. Por tanto, la cruz ya no es un patíbulo de ignominia y de muerte, sino, por el contrario, símbolo de victoria. Si queremos, podemos recibir de las lágrimas, de la sangre, de la muerte de Cristo, nuestra alegría, nuestra esperanza, nuestra salvación.”

(Pablo VI, Discurso al final del Via Crucis en el Coliseo, 12 abril 1968)



Giovanni di Paolo, “Llanto sobre Cristo muerto” (1440-1445), panel de predela, tempera sobre tabla de chopo. Pinacoteca Vaticana. (Photo/ © Museos Vaticanos)

Family has hope for unborn Baby Fulton

Only 5% chance of survival due to Potter's syndrome

JENNIFER WILLEMS
Catholic News Service

PEORIA, Ill. — Even though he hasn't been born yet, Fulton Joseph Hood of Dunlap, Illinois, has showered blessings on his parents, Royce and Elise, and five older siblings.

He also has made friends around the world who have joined the Hoods in praying for a miracle.

The prayers are needed because Baby Fulton has Potter's syndrome, which means he doesn't have kidneys and there is very little, if any, amniotic fluid to surround him in the uterus. Without that, the lungs don't develop either.

The Hoods have been told there is only a 5% chance their son will survive after birth.

Don't look for sad faces and gloom in the Hood household, however.

"There's no question there's a bit of an emotional roller coaster, but I've tried to really think about it as being grateful that the Lord has entrusted us with Fulton's life," Royce said. "I'm grateful that we get to be stewards and caretakers of this precious life that God has given us. We're going to surround him by as much love and joy as we can for as long as the Lord gives us with him."

"I don't think either of us has dwelled on anything sad for too long," added Elise. "For us, focusing on blessings and being grateful has really just helped bring about joy during a time that is difficult and sad."

Helping them to stay focused has been their parish family at St. Jude Church in Peoria, including Father Patrick Henehan, pastor, and Father Andru O'Brien, parochial vicar. The couple said Dominican Sister Maria Christi Nelson, principal of St. Jude School, has been part of their support system, too.

Seeking help from Another Fulton

The Hoods received Fulton's diagnosis following a 20-week sonogram and said their first reaction was shock. Royce added that he was determined to find a way to make things right.

"I don't know if this is a guy thing, but I'm like if there's a prob-



The Hood family of Dunlap, Ill., is seen in this undated photo. Elise Hood, pregnant with Fulton Joseph, and Royce are surrounded by their five children Ava, 7; Gabriel, 6; Augustine, 4; Leo, 3; and Royce Aaron, 1 (on his father's lap). The Hoods' unborn baby has Potter's syndrome, which means he doesn't have kidneys. There is only a 5% chance he will survive after birth. (CNS photo/Sarah Widener, Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep via The Catholic Post)

lem, I want to fix it," he told The Catholic Post, newspaper of the Diocese of Peoria. "OK, he's got some challenges. We'll figure this out."

But before they could get very far, Father Henehan invited them to St. Jude.

"I'll never forget that night at the church," Elise said. "He gave us both Communion. We knelt in front of the altar and he gave us a special blessing. I really truly felt the Blessed Mother and Jesus. They were just so present."

The Hoods said having that support from their parish priests was "amazing," and added that it was Father O'Brien who suggested having people pray to sainthood candidate Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen for his intercession on behalf of little Fulton Joseph.

Born and raised in Peoria, Elise knew about the El Paso, Illinois, native who would become a media pioneer and prolific author. She got reacquainted with Archbishop Sheen when she found some videos of "Life Is Worth Living," the prelate's TV series.

"I think all you have to do is watch him one time and you're kind of hooked," she said. "He's such a powerful speaker."

Another voice of support has

been Father Michael Orsi, chaplain at Ave Maria School of Law in Naples, Florida, where the couple met. Elise and Royce, a Florida native, got married Nov. 24, 2012.

Father Orsi has continued to be a trusted adviser and spiritual mentor, the Hoods said.

'Your will be done'

Acceptance of their unborn baby's condition was difficult at first, according to the couple, especially after they found out they didn't qualify for a study in which they hoped to participate.

"Letting go of that and really just knowing that Fulton is God's child and really just giving him to God and saying, 'Your will be done,' that was really difficult. But it truly also brought a lot of peace at the same time," Elise told The Post.

She also wanted to enjoy the pregnancy and enjoy having Fulton with them, said Elise, as Fulton's due date of March 31 approached.

"We all talk to Fulton. We have five other children, and they all talk to Fulton and give him hugs on my belly," she said.

Fulton's siblings are Ava, 7; Gabriel, 6; Augustine, 4; Leo, who just turned 3; and Royce Aaron, 1. The Hoods told them Fulton's prognosis

right away so they also would have time to process the news and go through everything as a family.

They pray together every night, especially for a miracle for Fulton's healing.

"I think they know that Fulton might not be here very long, so they're very wise that way," Elise said. "They want to make the most of every day."

She called that joy in appreciating each moment together a blessing, as is the bond the children are creating with their unborn brother.

"It's just kind of a beautiful witness of faith really. They know and love Fulton and they can't see him," Elise said. "They love their brother just like they love each other. It's beautiful."

Finding hope

Little things have given the family great hope, Royce said. For example, after not showing any signs of significant weight gain for several weeks, Fulton had gained a pound as of Elise's 37-week ultrasound March 15 and now weighs 3.15 pounds.

A musician since his teen years in Florida, Royce wrote "Fulton's Song" to grieve and help him wrap his head around what has been happening.

"He was 20 weeks old when we found out he had Potter's syndrome," he said, adding that babies can hear at around 18 weeks. "I thought, 'I need to write a song and sing to him how we feel about him and let him know how unique and special he is.'"

He incorporated Fulton's heartbeat into the song, which became its metronome and foundation.

"We'll surround you with all of our love," the song promises. "We will hold you/until God takes you home."

Another lyric says, "We want you to know you are a miracle."

"No matter what, he is a miracle made in the image and likeness of God from the moment he was conceived," Royce said. "If I could tell him that, I would want him to know that."

Editor's note: For more information, videos and updates, visit fultonjoseph.com.

Paintings

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piety to justify crime and violence.

During his visit to the southern Italian region of Calabria in 2014, the pope said that even if mob families continue to go to Mass and decorate their homes and hideouts with religious pictures, they have cut themselves off from communion with the Church and with God.

"Those who follow the path of evil, like the mafiosi do, are not in communion with God; they are excommunicated!" the pope said.

Thieves hit Colombian bishops' conference

BOGOTA, Colombia (CNS) — Using guns and dressed as police, a group of thieves broke into the Colombian bishops' conference headquarters in Bogota and took a safe that contained cash, checkbooks and deeds to bank accounts that the Church uses to finance programs for the poor.

The assault on Church property took place the night of March 29 as violent

crimes have increased in Colombia following a 7% contraction of the economy last year and high unemployment due to the pandemic.

"Our country is facing a very difficult situation," said Bogota Archbishop Luis José Rueda Aparicio. "These are tough times, and we hope this helps us to reflect on how to regain values like respect for others and respect for life."