



# The Catholic Virginian

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December 13, 2021

## Help and hope for Christmas — and beyond

### Catholic Charities' Seton Housing program aids single mothers

KAREN ADAMS

Special to The Catholic Virginian

This Christmas season, thanks to Commonwealth Catholic Charities, Kyrsten, a 20-year-old Roanoke mother, and her infant daughter have a home. They also have hope.

Earlier this year, Kyrsten was dealing with an unplanned pregnancy and homelessness, but through CCC's new Seton Housing program, she and her 4-month-old daughter, Avianna, now live in a safe, clean apartment of their own. (Their last names are omitted to protect their privacy.)

"I am so grateful to experience a program like this," Kyrsten said. "And I'm working hard to become independent."

Marge Thornton, CCC's program director for adoption and pregnancy counseling, said, "The goal of this project is to see, with these moms who want to bring

their babies to term, if you made sure they have what they needed, that they could make something of their lives, and especially of their children's lives."

Noting it's a powerful way of being pro-life, she added, "This puts feet to our faith."

Thornton explained that there is a lot of support in the early months, which will phase out as the mothers become more independent in all aspects of their lives.

"This is whole-life care for mother and baby," she said.

Announced in May, the pilot program helps expectant and new mothers across the diocese facing homelessness find the housing they need. It provides pregnancy counseling and case-management services as well. Housing units are subleased to participants either at no cost or a subsidized rate, with utilities and basic furnishings provided.

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Seton Housing participant Kyrsten and her 4-month-old daughter, Avianna, secured safe, subsidized housing in Roanoke in July. The program, developed by Commonwealth Catholic Charities, helps expectant or new mothers facing homelessness find adequate housing with basic furnishings, and assists with other needs (Photo/Marge Thornton)

## Migration policy changes when newcomers seen as kin

CINDY WOODEN

Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — With passion in Cyprus and reason in Greece, Pope Francis continued to articulate and adjust his teaching on migration.

### ANALYSIS

Since his first trip out of Rome as pope — his visit in 2013 to the Italian island of Lampedusa — Pope Francis has made the plight of migrants and refugees a central concern of his ministry.

For more than eight years, he has argued against closed borders and closed hearts.

But during his visit Dec. 5 to the Mavrovouni refugee camp on the Greek island of Lesbos and in remarks to reporters flying with him back to Rome the next day, Pope Francis also made it clear that in calling for outstretched hands he was not

ignoring the complexity of the migration issue or the limits of what some governments can do.

In other words, he does not expect people to look at migration with rose-colored glasses, but he does expect them to look at the actual migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers as brothers and sisters.

The tie of kinship is what should tip the balance when a community or a country weighs whether it has the resources needed to "welcome, protect, promote and integrate" the newcomers.

A focus on the people, not the numbers, has been constant since the beginning of Pope Francis' papacy, said Cardinal Michael Czerny, undersecretary of the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

"Pope Francis keeps on denouncing the despicable violations of human dignity carried out in the name of a misguided view of national security and tolerated by a culture of indifference,"

the cardinal told Catholic News Service.

### Grave illness

Meeting with migrants Dec. 3 in a Catholic church in Nicosia, Cyprus, Pope Francis' passion and compassion were on full display as he repeatedly departed from his prepared text.

"How many desperate people have set out in difficult and precarious conditions but did not arrive?" he asked those who had crossed the Mediterranean and made it to Cyprus. "We can think about this sea, which has become a great cemetery. Looking at you, I see the suffering caused by your journey; I see all those people who were kidnapped, sold, exploited and who are still on the journey, we know not where."

The tragedy is not hidden, he said, even if people prefer to look the other way.

"We see what is happening, and the worst

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The Catholic Virginian  
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## Let Christmas express our love for those in need

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**D**ear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

For many of us, Christmas is a season for our community of family coming together. It often centers upon a meal that includes traditional foods. I recall as a young boy, in our family, my grandmother and aunts would get together over several days before Christmas and make pasta from scratch for Christmas and other holiday meals. It was exhausting work for them, but it really was a labor of love.

They also made Italian cookies, like almond flavored biscotti with icing and pizzelles with a touch of anise. These were served after the meal, which always included large bowls of pasta, cooked peppers soaked in olive oil, along with the traditional American dishes of turkey, ham, sweet potatoes with vegetables and stuffing.

This was accompanied by multiple conversations, all taking place at once, about family matters, or the sharing of stories about traditions and Christmases past. Memories and associations from those meals are vivid and have withstood the test of time as they are passed from generation to generation.

While food and the meals at which it is served are often an integral part of our Christmas celebration, that might not be the case for everyone this year.

Inflation and supply chain shortages are resulting in some families not having the means to provide for such a meal. While some families can absorb the increased prices due to spikes in inflation and can do without certain items for their meals, there are others who are feeling more severely the impact of this situation.

Throughout the year, several dozen of our parishes and Catholic organizations, like the Knights of Columbus and Society of St. Vincent de Paul, collect and distribute food through pantries. There is no shortage of people who need this outreach, especially during the Advent and Christmas seasons. I was pleased to hear how so many parish communities sustained their food pantry outreach through the worst of the pandemic. I know this was a blessing for so many families.

In the Christmas story, we hear that there was no room at the inn for Mary and Joseph. The inn would not only have been a place for lodging, but also for food. Thus, we are left to wonder how long Mary and Joseph went hungry until they could find food after their journey.

We can examine our concerns about being able to feed the hungry in how Jesus fed 4,000 people with seven loaves of bread and a few fish. Just as we did a year

ago during COVID, we can remain generous while being creative. Doing what we can with what we have will ensure that those with fewer resources and who are burdened and vulnerable will have what they need.

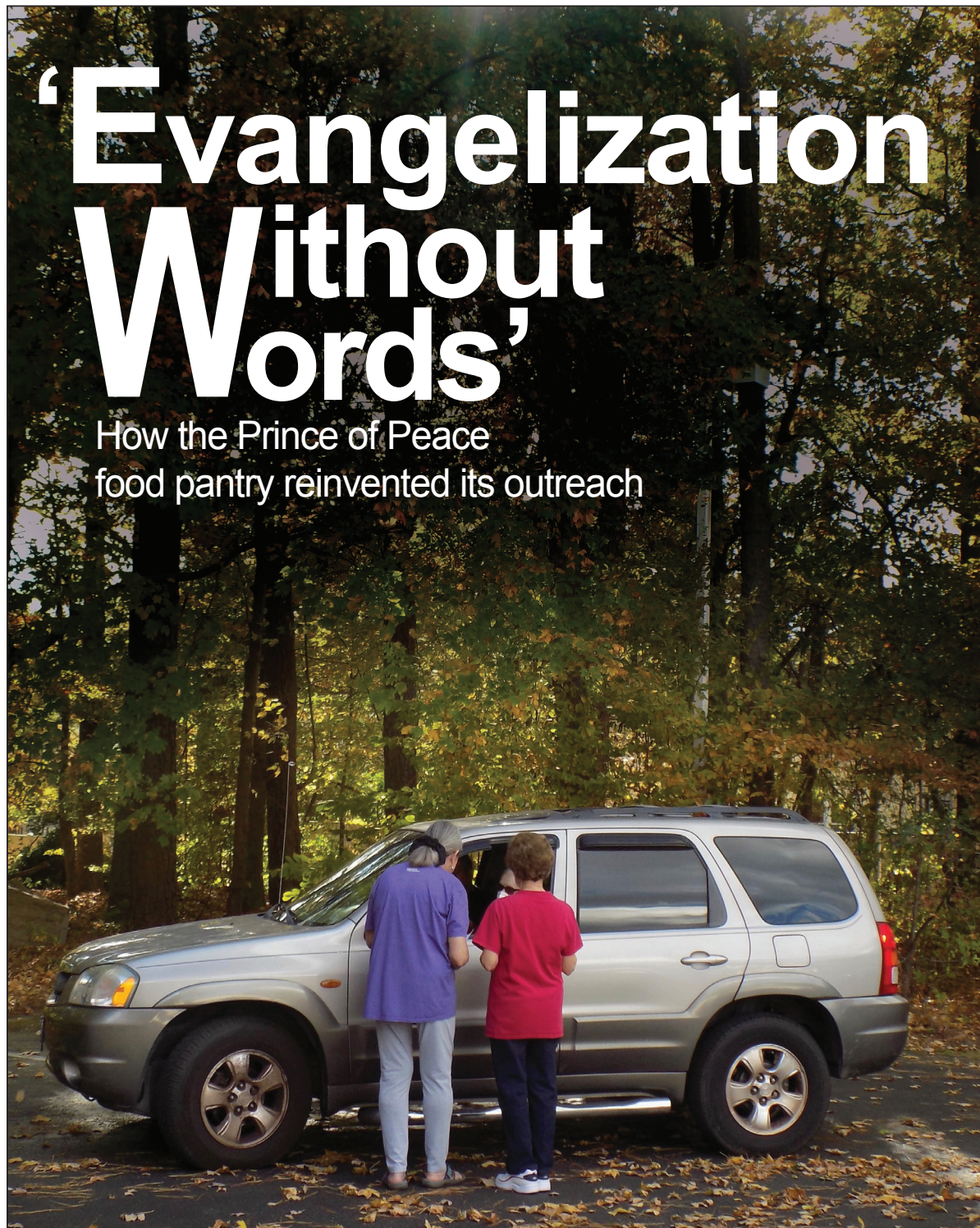
It might require all of us to reduce our own abundance so that, no matter what challenges inflation and shortages present, a multiplication of resources can occur, and our food pantries will be able to feed every Mary and Joseph who seeks their help.

As we plan the meals we will enjoy with family and friends, as we recall the great memories from previous holidays, let us remember that the Jesus whose birth we celebrate taught us to feed the hungry and to care for the poor and vulnerable. Let our expression of Christmas be our prayers for and actions on behalf of all of them.

May you and your loved ones have a blessed Christmas season!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Barry C. Knestout  
Bishop of Richmond



# ‘Evangelization Without Words’

How the Prince of Peace food pantry reinvented its outreach

Volunteers greet guests arriving at the Prince of Peace, Chesapeake, food pantry on Thursday, Nov. 18, for the ministry’s Thanksgiving special event. After more than 10 years of in-person distribution, the pantry switched to drive-through distribution of food due to the pandemic. (Photo/Wendy Klesch)

WENDY KLESCH  
Special to The Catholic Virginian

Yellow leaves against crisp blue skies. Fresh apples and sweet potatoes. Sharing stories around the table with family and friends, old and new. They’re all the ingredients for a day of gratitude and grace.

They all were a part, too, of a day set aside by 30 volunteers from Prince of Peace, Chesapeake, who celebrated Thanksgiving early, gathering on Thursday, Nov. 18, to distribute 160 meals to those in need as part of the parish’s food pantry ministry.

“We like to think of it as a day of evangelization without words, bringing the Gospel of Christ into the broader community,” said Nick Vacca, who has led the ministry’s efforts since its founding in 2010.

“They don’t just give you the food; they give you the Word,” said Dovia, one of the first guests to arrive at the pantry. “When you see the Lord working through people, there’s nothing else like it. When you thank God, you always have to remember to thank those he sent to you.”

### Time to celebrate

The Father Romeo D. Jazmin Food Pantry, named in honor of the current pastor of Prince of Peace, is open weekly, serving around 55 families every Wednesday.

Volunteers had planned to celebrate the 10th

anniversary of their ministry in October 2020 with a banquet, Vacca said, but the pandemic put all plans to observe the occasion on hold.

“So we’re having a party of sorts today,” Vacca said. “Whenever we get together, it’s a party. We’ve been blessed with some wonderful volunteers.”

The team gathered for the special event, setting up a series of long tables that stretched across the church parking lot in preparation for the arrival of a second team, which had taken a small fleet of trucks and trailers to pick up food donated by the Rose and Womble Foundation, a nonprofit headquartered in Suffolk.

A few local farmers who regularly contribute to the pantry also stopped by, bringing in cases of sweet potatoes and fresh collards.

“It’s wonderful to see everyone coming together to help feed the community,” said Mary Pepe, who was working alongside her granddaughter, Grayson Crow, a college sophomore just home for break. “It really brings home the meaning of the holiday.”

### Sharing stories

Once the trucks arrived, volunteers unloaded the cases and set items out along the tables, creating an assembly line of vegetables, cranberry sauce, stuffing and rolls, which they then packed into blue fabric bags for easy distribution. Additional stations were set up for frozen turkeys,

apples and potatoes.

The volunteers chatted as they worked, exclaiming over announcements of new grandchildren and sharing news of high school juniors who had somehow become college freshmen over the course of the pandemic.

“It’s like a reunion,” volunteer Marty McDermont said. “This is the first time we’ve all been together since last year.”

Before the pandemic, she explained, the food pantry was held inside the church and included a hospitality room where volunteers and guests could socialize over coffee.

“Since March of 2020, the pantry has had to reinvent itself,” she said, converting to a drive-through format.

It’s also operated with a smaller staff, since some volunteers found they needed to take a step back due to health concerns or to care for children home from school.

“Holding an event like this, outside on such a beautiful day, brings everyone back together again,” volunteer Ruth Koon said.

### Light of Christ

As a brisk wind sent a cascade of leaves fluttering over the parking lot and the line of waiting cars grew, a few parishioners went to greet arriving clients, catching up with still more familiar faces as they chatted through car windows.

Although the pantry’s drive-through method helps to serve guests efficiently while maintaining social distance, volunteers said it’s important to them that the pantry does not feel like a drive-through.

“The best part is getting to know the people coming in,” volunteer Margie Breslin said. The team does its best, she said, to tailor its efforts to each family’s needs, adding a personal touch whenever possible.

“I always try to save the little cupcakes that we get for families with small children,” she said. “Or if there’s a mom with a lot of teenagers, we try to load them up on snacks.”

“It’s been great,” said Ronald, who has been visiting the pantry for the past year. “You should see how long the lines can be, but they always take their time with each person. They don’t just give you the food and tell you to scat. They treat you with dignity, with respect.”

“We’re so glad that we can do this,” Vacca said. “We’ve had to make some changes over the past months, but the important thing is to bring a little hope, a little of the light of Christ into people’s lives.”

“And we’ll still have another party sometime,” he added, with a laugh. “Maybe for our 12th anniversary.”



Some of the 30 Prince of Peace, Chesapeake, food pantry volunteers unload and organize canned and boxed goods, apples and potatoes in preparation for distributing 160 meals on Thursday, Nov. 18, in the church parking lot. (Photo/Wendy Klesch)

# How technology has reshaped worship, catechesis

## Priest emphasizes 'encounter with God' in Keane lecture

WENDY KLESCH

Special to The Catholic Virginian

**H**ow real are our virtual experiences?

The question might have sounded paradoxical 20 years ago, but it's one that has become increasingly relevant today.

Paulist Father Ricky Manalo, composer and author, addressed a crowd of around 100 people Friday, Dec. 4, at Immaculate Conception, Hampton, speaking on issues emerging from the intersection of faith, technology and the media.

The lecture, titled, "Onsite and Online: Catholic Worship and Technology in a 2.5 World," was the first offered by the Bishop Keane Institute since the start of the pandemic.

"What defines authentic worship?" Father Manalo asked. "How has technology and the media reshaped our spiritual lives?"

"We can't avoid the outside world," he said. "We can't take the iPhone away. We can for a while; we can put it in a basket. But it's always there."

***"Whenever we celebrate the Mass, it's not just about the people within those four walls. It's for everyone. For all people."***

— PAULIST FATHER RICKY MANALO

### Beyond four walls

Father Manalo began his examination of faith and technology with a trivia question.

"Who is the patron saint of television?" he asked.

The audience responded with surprised laughter at the idea that something we often think of as a stumbling block, rather than as an aid in our spiritual life, should have been assigned the honor of a patron.

But, indeed, it has one: St. Clare of Assisi, who, on Christmas Eve of 1252, found that she was too ill to leave her bed to attend Mass. She prayed to the Holy Spirit that she might take part, and the Lord granted her a vision, an image of the Mass projected on her bedroom wall.

It's apropos, Father Manalo said, considering how many Cath-

olics today find spiritual nourishment through televised Masses.

"My mother watches EWTN faithfully, every day," he said. "That's how she goes to Mass now."

So questions of authenticity, of what constitutes real participation, are not as new as they may seem, he said. The issue was discussed as far back as 155, in fact, when Christian apologist and martyr, St. Justin, instructed the deacons of his community to take the Eucharist to those unable to attend Mass.

In a more contemporary example, Father Manalo spoke of his own childhood. Growing up in a family of six children, he said, it wasn't unusual to be running late for church.

"My sister would always keep us waiting in the car," he recalled, "so by the time we got there, we'd be relegated to the extension space. There was a sense of belonging, but not really; of being there, but not really being able to hear what was going on."

"But yet, it 'counted,'" he said, as the audience laughed again, this time in recognition of the experience, "because I was there."

The anecdote, he said, speaks of a larger truth: namely that, wherever we are — physically, mentally or spiritually — Christ's presence is never limited to the four walls of the church building.

"Whenever we celebrate the Mass, it's not just about the people within those four walls," he said. "It's for everyone. For all people."

### Allow the world to enter

Conversely, the world does not remain outside of the walls of the church, nor of religious education classrooms.

In a postmodern world of competing narratives, he said, whenever something about the Catholic faith is taught, students are immediately connecting it with other ideas — with the Internet, pop culture, the perspectives of those they know from other backgrounds, other faiths.

"The four walls have become far more porous and flexible," he said. "But that can be a good thing, too. They are relating what they learn to the world."

Rather than ignoring technology and media, he said, Catholics can accompany students where they are. If a child is devoted to Marvel superheroes, for example, why not use that interest as a springboard for a broader conversation?

"What do they see in the char-

acters? Can we find a Christian message there?" he asked.

In 2015, during Pope Francis' visit to the Philippines, Father Manalo said, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle told a crowd of around 7,500 young adults to take their phones out at the end of the Mass.

"He said, 'At the end of closing prayer, I want you to text someone out in the world, 'Go out and pro-

claim the good news.' I'll count to three, and then I want everyone to send it out."

The beauty of the gesture, Father Manalo said, is that the cardinal took a technology that the people were already using and gave it new meaning, turning text messages into thousands of calls to follow Christ.

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## CLERGY APPOINTMENTS

Most Reverend Barry C. Knestout, bishop of Richmond, has announced the following clergy assignments:

### OFFICIAL

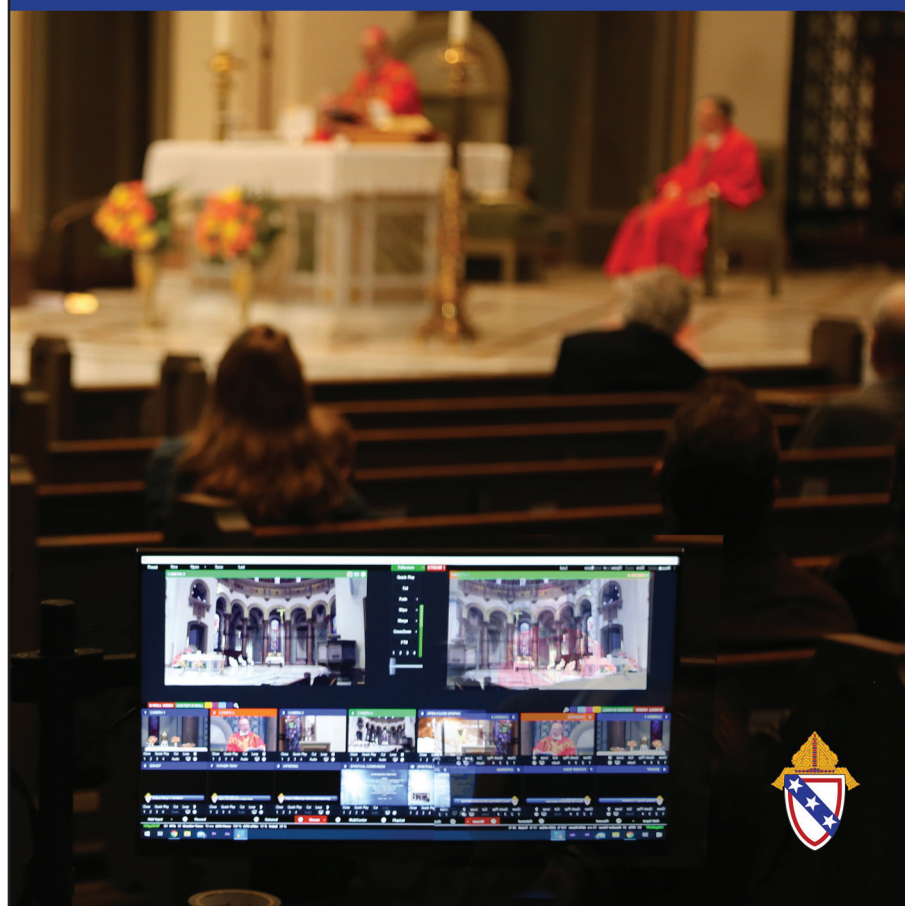
**Father Peter Calixtus Ofori Barfi**, from ministry outside the Diocese of Richmond to parochial vicar of St. Gabriel, Chesterfield, and Good Samaritan, Amelia, effective, Tuesday, Nov. 23, 2021. Father Barfi is a priest of the Archdiocese of Kumasi, Ghana, with undergraduate degrees in sacred theology, sociology and religion.

**Father Patrick Kofi Boadu**, from ministry outside the Diocese of Richmond to parochial vicar of St. Michael the Archangel, Glen Allen, effective, Tuesday, Nov. 23, 2021. Father Boadu is a priest of the Archdiocese of Kumasi, Ghana, with graduate degrees in philosophy, education guidance and counseling and an undergraduate degree in sacred theology.

**Benedictine Father Mark Wenzinger**, from ministry outside the Diocese of Richmond to parochial vicar of St. Gregory the Great, Virginia Beach, effective Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021.

*Livestream Cathedral!*

Please continue to celebrate Sunday Mass with us *after Dec. 26* at [richmondcathedral.org](http://richmondcathedral.org).



# Spina Bifida doesn't hinder children's love, joy

## Pocta Family's faith is 'home, refuge'

JENNIFER NEVILLE

Special to The Catholic Virginian

**C**ristina Pocta doesn't want her two children, both with Spina Bifida, to be inspiring because they "push a (wheel) chair around." She wants people to be inspired by their kindness, joy, compassion and love for everyone. Due to Spina Bifida, Maria, 9, is paralyzed from the waist down, and Andrew Joseph, 6, from the knees down.

Spina Bifida is a birth defect caused by a baby's spinal column not closing all the way as it develops in the womb. Because it typically occurs within the first 28 days of pregnancy while the neural tube is forming, it often occurs before a woman knows she is pregnant. It can be detected through a blood test during the 16th to 18th weeks of pregnancy, with an ultrasound or a needle extraction of a small amount of fluid in the womb.

Spina Bifida might cause physical and intellectual disabilities that range from mild to severe. No one knows the cause of Spina Bifida, but "scientists believe that genetic and environmental factors act together to cause the condition," according to the Spinal Bifida Association's (SBA) website.

Cristina and her husband, Andrew, were raised Catholic, and they remain steadfast in their faith despite the challenges of having two children with Spina Bifida.

She said, "Our faith is who we are." It has been their "home, a place of refuge."

They went on separate mission trips to Honduras as young adults. Andrew spent two and a half years there from 2006 to 2008, and Cristina went on a six-month mission in 2008. However, they didn't meet until 2010 when mutual friends introduced them in Virginia Beach.

While dating, Andrew moved to New York City, where they both worked for the Archdiocese of New York. She worked as a case manager for Catholic Charities, and he was the assistant director of the Spanish Department of the Family Life/Respect Life Office. They married in 2011.

### Choosing life

When Cristina was 18 weeks pregnant with Maria, their "honeymoon baby," the couple learned via an ultrasound that their daughter had Spina Bifida. The New York doctor painted a bleak picture, telling them that their child would be paralyzed and "mentally retarded." He encouraged them to terminate the pregnancy, Cristina said. They were 25 years old at the time.

The doctor said they had their "whole life ahead of them," and if they had their baby, their lives would be consumed with caring for her. He offered to refer Cristina to a hospital for an abortion and said it could be done quickly so they could move on with their lives.

Cristina said it was hard to hear the diagnosis and the doctor's recommendation, and she reacted with "hysterical crying," Andrew said, and he with anger at the doctor's callousness. The couple didn't consider abortion as an option.

When Cristina was 21 weeks pregnant, Maria underwent surgery to repair her spine at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. She and Andrew stayed in the area as Cristina was on bed rest and was monitored closely until Maria was born in 2012. Maria did not have the



**Andrew and Cristina Pocta, holding their children Maria and Andrew Joseph, rely heavily upon their faith in raising children with Spina Bifida. They are members of the Basilica of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Norfolk.** (Photo/Cristina Pocta)

cognitive disability the doctor predicted.

After she was born, the family moved to Virginia Beach.

### 'Lord always provides'

When Cristina conceived Andrew Joseph, they didn't fathom having another child with Spina Bifida, Cristina said. Previous genetic testing didn't identify anything that could cause the birth defect, and the SBA website said the likelihood of having a second child with Spina Bifida was only 3%.

When praying the morning of a routine ultrasound, Cristina said she felt "at peace" when God whispered to her heart to remember, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways" – words from Isaiah 55:8.

When the ultrasound showed that Andrew Joseph had Spina Bifida, it was again hard to hear, but abortion was out of the picture. The day after he was born, he had surgery to close the lesion on his back.

Both children have been in wheelchairs since they were about a year old. The Pocta home, a duplex shared with Cristina's parents, is not accessible for the larger wheelchairs, but they don't want to move because they want to care for her aging parents. Andrew said they need to expand and renovate the home, a project will cost "hundreds of thousands of dollars" – money they don't have.

But he said he isn't worried about it because "the Lord always provides." Throughout the years, people, sometimes anonymous ones, have donated money, primarily for expensive, specialized wheelchairs and equipment they couldn't afford.

### 'Grateful heart'

The children have deep compassion, their parents said. They talk to homeless people on street corners and get to know them by name, and they "see Jesus in each person," Cristina

said. Sometimes the family brings the homeless people food. Sometimes they eat lunch with them. When time doesn't permit a conversation, they say hello.

"God didn't give them the ability to walk, but he's given them the ability to love in a way that I'm just in awe," Cristina said.

Andrew works as an environmental scientist with MAP Environmental Inc. in Virginia Beach. Cristina homeschools both children, and they are waiting to adopt a third.

Maria is in fourth grade, and her favorite subject is history. Her favorite TV show is "Full House." She likes swimming, painting with water colors, playing with Fidgets and listening to Praise and Worship songs. Most of all she likes playing with Barbies with her best friend.

She said at times God talks to her when she prays, and sometimes when she is sad during the day, she hears God's voice telling her, "I love you, and you're beautiful."

Andrew Joseph is in kindergarten. His favorite food is pizza, and his favorite subjects are science, art and music. He enjoys playing video games, swimming, playing outside and zooming around ramps and popping wheelies at a skateboarding park.

Christina and Andrew described their children as "a blessing." Maria and Andrew Joseph have shown them how to see the world differently, Andrew said. He no longer takes things such as walking, driving a car, getting on a bus and strolling in the sand for granted. Cristina said she has "a heart that is a little more grateful."

### 'Happy life'

Andrew said that because the children have had to "deal with disappointments and struggles since a really young age," they have a "deep faith and trust in God" that is unique for children their age. Those challenges include

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# With hope, we know God is truly present

## GUEST COMMENTARY

FATHER HERB WEBER  
CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

I took time to reread my annual letter to the parish from Advent 2020. In anticipation of Christmas last year, I reminded everyone that we would find a way to celebrate the birth of the Lord that would help people remain safe as well as participative in this wonderful mystery.

I wrote that our parish had been streaming Mass for nearly 10 years and our new church building with three cameras and skilled volunteer technicians could provide a very powerful at-home experience for those uncomfortable with gathering in a larger group.

I encouraged families to participate as a family and reminded them that the local bishop had lifted the obligation of Mass attendance ever since COVID-19 had shut down our parishes the

previous March.

Even at that, I told parishioners that we would have a number of Masses and that every other pew was closed off, that the church air filtration was good, and that people were to wear masks.

When Christmas arrived, the parish music director was out due to COVID-19. So was another priest who was scheduled to help with Masses. Attendance at Mass was low, and it was hard for me to truly celebrate even though I knew many people were with me remotely.

I wondered if I had oversold my concerns, but then I also knew that the vaccines had not yet been made available to anyone.

A year has passed, and many parishioners are coming back to church on a regular basis. Nonetheless, there are still clouds of worry hanging over people's heads.

Some people fear mixing with others in an indoor setting. Those

who are immunocompromised continue to appreciate the quality of our online streaming of Mass.

Others are upset that people worry about COVID-19, even stating they don't want to live with that kind of fear controlling them. Then there are those who are tired

and exhausted because of the way our society has become polarized over everything from race to politics to mask-wearing to immigration to Church leadership.

In short, people need a savior, and they need that savior now!

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## Love listens, then acts to address racial injustice

Kudos for recently publishing several articles and subsequent letters to the editor addressing racism. As might be expected, the letters were written from different perspectives on this sensitive issue. One writer suggested several authors to explore. I'm sure other readers might suggest other writers whose worldview aligns with theirs. I suggest we look to Scripture and Catholic Social Teaching, including pastoral letters by the USCCB, to study this issue.

In his song, "Follow Me (87 Times)," Bryan Sirchio sings, "God save us from the Christs we create in our image (you know what I mean). The Jesus who's as left wing or right wing as we. The one who baptizes our cherished ideologies. The one who always seems to favor our side against some enemy."

In Luke 10:27, Jesus says, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."

This commandment is especially relevant when we talk about loving our neighbors of color. Interestingly, the USCCB's pastoral letter on racism is titled, "Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love."

Note the recurring call

to love. The bishops encourage us "to listen and know the stories of our brothers and sisters. We must create opportunities to hear, with open hearts, the tragic stories that are deeply imprinted on the lives of our brothers and sisters, if we are to be moved with empathy to promote justice."

To put it succinctly, love listens, and then acts to address injustice tied to race.

— Jimmy Culpepper  
Chesapeake

## Pope, not evangelizers, can bring back Christ's presence

In response to Bishop Kevin Rhoades' plea for evangelizers of the Eucharist (Catholic Virginian, Nov. 1): Mother Angelica (founder of TV's EWTN) said many years ago this would happen!

When the Second Vatican Council approved the removal of the altar rails and kneelers, and parishioners walked up to receive Communion in their own hand instead of kneeling and receiving his holy presence on their tongue, Jesus' real presence began to disappear.

To add fuel to the fire, tabernacles with Jesus Christ's true presence were removed from the altar and put in a small prayer room. Upon entering God's holy house of worship where the true presence of Jesus Christ lives on the altar, genuflect-

ing and kneeling to pray for his intercession, he is gone!

This has a lot to do with Catholics feeling comfortable in other denominations' churches. The reverence and holy presence has disappeared from the one and only Church established by Jesus Christ.

The only one that can bring back Jesus Christ's holy presence is the pope, not evangelizers!

— Dot Presson Hewitt  
Dendron

## An opportunity to bear 'good fruit'

This letter is directed to the millennial from Newport News who asked a question about the Nativity Fast (Catholic Virginian, Nov. 29).

In my experience, the Eastern Catholic Churches (they are in communion with Pope Francis) follow traditions very close to what I have learned was the medieval Roman Catholic tradition. Since these churches arose in cultures of Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa, they do not exactly match our Roman heritage, but they are pretty close.

Several Eastern parishes are in Virginia — two from the Byzantine Catholic Church are in Hampton Roads. If you want to experience the tradition within a community setting, perhaps visit these parishes from time to time.

For your enrichment

at home, I recommend you purchase "The Publican's Prayer Book," which has instructions on fasting, helpful prayers, a short version of the Liturgy of the Hours in the Melkite Catholic Church, and spiritual instructions of various saints (<https://melkite.org/products-page/prayer-books/publicans-prayer-book>).

Roman Catholics recovering our rightful traditions, through personal education and living the traditions of sister Catholic churches, will bear good fruit in our spiritual lives, our diocese and the Roman Catholic Church.

— Anthony Rago  
Newport News

## Share time, talents and love with elderly

On Dec. 1, Bon Secours sold its four senior care facilities located in our diocese. For over 30 years,

thousands of seniors were provided a safe, comfortable home and quality care at St. Francis nursing center in Newport News, Maryview nursing center in Suolk and the two Province Place assisted living centers in Hampton Roads.

Unfortunately, due to a complex array of issues facing senior care facilities, the Catholic-based health system made the difficult decision to end this service after much prayerful discernment.

As these facilities continue to operate under new ownership, I pray that members of the Hampton Roads community continue to share their time, talents and love with the frail elderly that call these healthcare facilities "home" and the professional caregivers their "family."

— Irvin Land Jr.  
Virginia Beach

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## Hope

*Continued from Page 1*

Participants also receive employment training and placement, mental health counseling, financial counseling and access to food and nutrition assistance and baby supplies, at little or no cost. Case managers also can refer them for health care and public benefits.

"We are investing in the lives



**Thanks to Commonwealth Catholic Charities' Seton Housing program, 4-month-old Avianna and her mother, Kyrsten, have a place to live.** (Photo/Marge Thornton)

of mothers and their children," stated Jay Brown, CEO of CCC, in the announcement. "Seton Housing is designed to provide the support that women need to make life-affirming decisions and to achieve independence and self-sufficiency. It is about having a long-term impact that transforms families' situations from crisis and fear to stability and confidence."

### Hope for the lost

The Seton Housing program was developed through a grant from the Diocese of Richmond's Office of Social Ministry and Respect Life, as well as funds from St. Mary Catholic Church, Richmond, and anonymous individual donors.

It is named after St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, the first U.S.-born saint, an educator who lost her mother at age 3 and cared for and educated the poor later in life.

At a November meeting at the Roanoke CCC office, Kyrsten described her life when she became pregnant and then homeless.

"I felt lost at first," she said, after a family member's home became too full and she needed to leave. She then stayed with friends temporarily. In the summer, she was considering a shelter when she learned about CCC and called Thornton, in tears.

Thornton worked quickly to find stable housing in July, as the baby was due in August. She has counseled Kyrsten from that first conversation and has given

steady emotional support as well as material support — especially important when Avianna was born after a difficult C-section.

Kyrsten admits to some regrettable decisions in the past, but she now sees a hopeful future.

"I want to set a good example for Avianna; I want to figure it out for her. I'm doing everything I can to make a better life for her," she said, adding that for the first time in years, she is looking forward to Christmas. "I want to give her everything."

### Help for anyone in need

Marnie Mills, CCC's mission advancement associate and a parishioner at St. Andrew, Roanoke, noted that the agency seeks to help anyone in need, whoever they are.

"It's right there in our mission statement." ("Commonwealth Catholic Charities provides quality, compassionate human services to all people, especially the most vulnerable, regardless of faith.") "This work has really strengthened my own faith, just seeing the kindness of people at CCC and in the community," she said of the agency which also has offices in Charlottesville, Newport News, Norfolk, Norton and Petersburg. "The Seton Housing program is another example of that kindness."

The program currently has funding for three women in Richmond — those spots are filled — and two women in Roanoke, of which Kyrsten is the first.

Kyrsten has a part-time job at home as a telephone consultant for a company that tracks voting patterns. She earned her GED and hopes to work full-time soon, either at home or outside her home if she can find reliable and affordable childcare. She is also taking driver training classes to earn her driver's license and participates in CCC's required financial wellness program.

CCC is paying Kyrsten's rent and utilities until she is able to do so herself and is helping with her internet service, which she needs for her job. CCC also assists with buying groceries that may not be available at the St. Francis Food Pantry, such as diapers, formula and other baby items.

For mothers like Kyrsten, who may have little or no income and a sparse work history, it can be difficult and overwhelming to find adequate housing. CCC provided Kyrsten's landlord with a promissory note that the agency would cover the rent and utilities until she can do so herself.

At the Roanoke CCC office, mothers in need also may receive children's clothing and other baby items such as blankets, diapers and formula. The items are given by area churches, with much of

them coming from Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Salem, which holds quarterly baby showers for donations.

### 'Get people on their feet'

Thornton explained that the Seton Housing program is just one way the agency works to identify barriers to success that people like Kyrsten are experiencing. For example, if someone has lost her job due to COVID and thus falls behind on rent and cannot feed her family, she may go to the St. Francis Food Pantry for free groceries. While there, the staff will inquire about her situation and may direct her to another CCC department to help with other needs.

"There are a lot of internal referrals," Thornton explained. "We all work together to get people on their feet."

"I want to be independent

eventually," Kyrsten said, smiling at Avianna. "But even if you want to be independent and you feel like you shouldn't accept things, you may need to do it for your child. I do it for her."

She added that her unstable family life left her without parental figures for support or examples.

"Marge is really like my mother now," she said, a statement that caught Thornton by surprise.

"Hearing that made me a little emotional," said Thornton, who visits Kyrsten regularly. "I am so proud of her and she's a great mother."

Kyrsten wants women in similar situations to keep looking for help because she knows from experience that it is out there.

"I would tell them not to give up," she said. "This program has restored my faith in people."



**The Pocta family participated in the celebration of the dedication of the church and altar at their parish, the Basilica of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Norfolk, on Sunday, Sept. 26.** (Photo/Vy Barto)

## Faith

*Continued from Page 5*

multiple surgeries and frequent doctor appointments, emergency room visits and physical and occupational therapy.

"I think Maria, as she is getting older, her heart is starting to question more" such as why she "has been chosen to be in a wheelchair and why can't God heal her," Cristina said. She struggles, but she has good friends, family and a Church community

"who love her, and that's been a gift." The family belongs to the Basilica of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Norfolk.

Cristina and Andrew said the hardest part of parenting them is watching the children struggle and not being able to do anything about it, but despite the challenges that come with raising their children, Cristina said, "We live a very happy life."

"Honestly, I can say that with all my heart," she said. "We have a good life."

# Insisting on child's baptism could be counterproductive



**QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**  
FATHER KENNETH DOYLE  
CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

**Q.** Our son and his wife-to-be are not practicing Catholics. They have a little girl, now 20 months old, who needs to be baptized. How do we as parents approach the subject — without turning them against the faith completely or against us? (Regina, Saskatchewan)

**A.** Let me say first that I admire very much your love for Catholicism and your desire to pass on the benefits of the Catholic faith to your granddaughter. My goal is the same as yours: to bring her parents back to regular practice of the faith so they can offer strong religious support to their child.

The wording of your question, though, may be significant. You say that your granddaughter “needs to be baptized.” Is it possible that you think that is her only chance for heaven? I raise the question because there are some people who believe that.

So let me clarify that first. In 2007, the Vatican's International Theological Commission, with the approval of Pope Benedict XVI, said that the concept of limbo reflected “an unduly restrictive view of salvation” and that the mercy of God offers good reason to hope that babies who die without being baptized can go to heaven.

Now, on to your question. Canon 868 of the Church's Code of Canon Law states that “for an infant to be baptized licitly ... there must be a founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion.”

As you describe the situation, that sounds doubtful. If you see an opportunity in a quiet way to speak to your son about the religious path he might be considering for their daughter, then do it.

But be careful not to force it. To strong-arm your son about his religious responsibility could have a negative effect, including jeopardizing your relationship with him for a long time.

Do you think it might be better for now simply to pray for them, that they will reach the choice of baptism on their own? And remember that God cares about the baby's salvation even more than you do.

**Q.** In a recent column, a woman wrote to say that her husband had been refusing for many years to have sexual relations with her, and you suggested that this violates the marriage contract. If sex is so important to a marriage, would you consider the marriage between the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph to have been a valid marriage? (Indianapolis)

**A.** Yes, the marriage of Mary and Joseph was a valid marriage. Even though this marriage was never

consummated, it was the spouses' consent that validated the marriage-bond, and their decision to maintain Mary's virginity was made mutually.

They gave full consent to their unique call to raise the child Jesus as husband and wife. The Church's understanding is that marriage is ordered by its nature both to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring. At the time of their marriage, both Mary and Joseph knew of Mary's pregnancy.

The Gospel of Matthew (1:16) explicitly recognizes the validity of this marriage when it calls Joseph “the husband of Mary”; and in the eucharistic prayer of the Mass we say, “Blessed Joseph, her Spouse.”

**Q.** My sister claims that receiving holy Communion in the hand is disrespecting the Eucharist. I told her that it must be OK because the first sacrament of the Eucharist was received in the hand at the Last Supper. When was the practice of receiving on the tongue started? (City and state withheld)

**A.** It is safe to assume that at the Last Supper, when Jesus said, “Take and eat; this is my body,” the apostles received that first Eucharist in their hands. And that practice continued during the early centuries of the Church.

At the Council of Constantinople in 692, Christians were instructed that “if anyone wishes to be a partic-

ipator of the immaculate body ... and to offer himself for the communion, let him draw near, arranging his hand in the form of a cross.” That practice was the norm throughout the early Middle Ages.

But by the 13th century, St. Thomas Aquinas wrote in the “Summa Theologiae”: “Out of reverence toward this sacrament, nothing touches it but what is consecrated; hence the corporal and chalice are consecrated, and likewise the priest's hands, for touching this sacrament. Hence it is not lawful for anyone else to touch it except from necessity, for instance, if it were to fall upon the ground.”

In 1969, the Church document “Memoriale Domini” outlined Pope Paul VI's decision to maintain the practice of receiving the Eucharist on the tongue: “Communion (on the tongue) must be retained ... not merely because it has many centuries of tradition behind it, but especially because it expresses the faithful's reverence for the Eucharist.”

But in 1977, permission for administering Communion in the hand was granted by the Holy See to the United States, and the General Instruction of the Roman Missal now reads: “The communicant ... receives the sacrament either on the tongue or, where this is allowed and if the communicant so chooses, in the hand” (No. 161). The option belongs to the individual. Both can be done with reverence, and neither way is more noble.

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



*Merry  
Christmas*

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# Contemplate Jesus — the great gift we've been given



**J**ohn of the Cross, Carmelite saint, mystic, poet and doctor of the Church, whose feast is celebrated on Dec. 14, is renowned for his description of the spiritual journey toward union with God. His works, frequently cited by theologians and spiritual writers, can also be found on the shelves in New Age bookstores, which speaks to the broad appeal of his teachings.

Among his most notable works are “The Ascent of Mount Carmel,” “The Dark Night,” “The Spiritual Canticle” and “The Living Flame of Love.” However, among his lesser-known poems is one entitled simply, “Romances.”

The brevity of the title belies the depth and breadth of all it contains, for through poetic verse, the saint imagines a dialogue between God the Father and God the Son about their love for humanity from before the creation of the world through the Incarnation and the birth of God’s own Son.

As the conversation progresses, John of the Cross gives voice to the Son, who tells the Father, “I will go and seek my bride, take upon myself her weariness and labors... and I will die for her, lifting her out of that deep I will restore her to you.”

The poem describes how through the Incarnation, the Son

of God who only had a Father now has a mother, and the bridegroom of souls now has a bride.

During this holy season of Advent, John’s poem is especially poignant as it acknowledges that “In perfect love, the law holds; that the lover becomes like the one he loves.”

As daughter of the Father, mother of the Son, and spouse of the Holy Spirit, no person is more Godlike than the humble virgin of Nazareth. Chosen for the role she was to play in salvation history, Mary was sinless from the moment of her conception, which immediately sets her apart.

Although the dogma of Mary’s Immaculate Conception (celebrated on Dec. 8) was not declared a doctrine of faith until 1854, (centuries after John of the Cross lived) the saint seemed to intuit what the 13th century Franciscan theologian Blessed John Duns Scotus argued:

Mary most holy is a daughter of Adam like all mankind, yet she did not contract original sin... It

is, in fact, a more perfect redemption than liberative redemption, because it is more perfect to preserve a person from a fall than to lift him up after falling. It is a more excellent benefit to preserve someone from evil, rather than permit him to sin and need to be freed from it.

To this passage, we could add that Mary’s holiness needs to be seen not just as the absence of sin, but as the continuous flow of divine life within her soul. Akin to the burning bush, her heart was set aflame with the fire of God’s love, forever burning but never consumed, the perfect exemplar of John’s “Living Flame of Love.”

She who dwelt beyond Satan’s reach was sent as dew upon the Earth that ushered in a new dawn. As heaven’s purest fleece, she lent her womb to become the loom where the divine shuttle wove flesh and blood, bone and sinew to create the seamless garment that would clothe her son with a nature that was human and divine.

In keeping with this divine activity, John of the Cross wrote, “When it was time for the birth of the Son of God / he went forth like a bridegroom from the bridal chamber / embracing his bride / holding her in his arms, whom the gracious Mother laid in a manger.”

According to John, God our Father looked upon the human face of the Word made flesh and exclaimed:

Now you see, Son, that your bride was made in your image

And “the Mother gazed in sheer wonder on such an exchange:

In God, man’s weeping / And in man gladness.

To the one and the other / Things usually so strange.”

In keeping with the magnitude of the mysteries that surround us, Advent calls us to contemplate the wondrous gift we have been given in the person of Jesus Christ, who makes his dwelling place in our soul. Just as the Word of God grew in the womb of Mary, so the indwelling God that was planted in our soul at baptism can grow and mature – but not without our fiat.

As we reflect upon these profound mysteries, may Advent be a time of grace and wonder, knowing that God has visited his people, not as some distant or mythical deity, but as one of us so that we can become one with God.

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

## Why you should participate in a penance service



**T**here are certain traditions that we associate with Advent – Advent wreaths, Advent calendars, the Jesse Tree and gradually decorating for Christmas. Catholics celebrate another Advent tradition – the Advent penance service.

There are many Catholics who have made it a practice to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation more often, i.e., weekly or monthly. I have often suggested to parishioners that a minimum use of the sacrament would be at least four times a year – winter, spring, summer and fall. But many Catholics regularly celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation at their parish’s Advent and Lenten penance services.

You might ask, “I understand why a pen-

ance service makes sense in Lent, but why Advent? Is it more than clearing the decks for the celebration of Christmas?”

The answer, of course, is yes, there is an intimate connection with the mystery of the Incarnation and our preparation for that celebration.

Pay attention this week to our second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews. It lays out the mission of Jesus, the reason for the incarnation, in clear language: “Behold, I come to do your will.”

The Father’s will is that Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, become the definitive sacrifice that would set us free from our sins and open up our way to sharing the life of God.

Because Jesus came to do the Father’s will, it is now possible for us to do the same with the help of the Holy Spirit. It is now possible for us to follow the example of our Blessed Mother, who answered the angel Gabriel’s announcement with the words, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”

A handmaid was a humble servant whose vocation was to follow the will of her Lord. Because Jesus did the will of his Father, Jesus’ mother was given the grace from the very first moment of her existence to do the same. Because Jesus took on our nature, it is now possible for us, united with him, to conform our lives with the will of the Father.

Yet, that has not always been our path in this life. More often than not, we want to do our own will rather than the will of the Father, and in doing our will, we diminish ourselves by our disobedience to the Father’s love. But Jesus has given us a path to re-conform our lives with his.

Therefore, in preparing for the celebration of his nativity, it is fitting that we use the sacrament of reconciliation to conform our will once again with the will of Jesus Christ who perfectly conforms his will to the will of his Father.

There are certain traditions that are more than traditions. There are traditions that connect us with the essence of the feasts we celebrate. Have a traditional Advent this year. Participate in your parish’s Advent penance service.

*Msgr. Timothy Keeney is pastor of Incarnation, Charlottesville.*

### Fourth Sunday of Advent – Year C

**Mi 5:1-4a;**

**Ps 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19;**

**Heb 10:5-10;**

**Lk 1:39-45**

## Celebrating church rededication at St. Andrew, Roanoke



Left: At the Mass for the rededication of St. Andrew the Apostle Church, Roanoke, Father Kevin Segerblom, pastor, leads the applause for Wayne Gould, who coordinated the \$7.7 million renovation of the church. Right: The parish choir provided the music for the celebration on Tuesday, Nov. 30, the feast of St. Andrew the Apostle. (Photos/Ryan Hunt Photography)



Left: Assisted by Deacon Mark Allison, Bishop Barry C. Knestout accepts the offertory gifts from parishioners Mark and Soo Ting Topolski. Right: Members of the parish and others participate in the celebration. (Photos/Ryan Hunt Photography)

## Migration

*Continued from Page 1*

thing is that we are becoming used to it. 'Oh yes, today another boat capsized, so many lives were lost,' people say to themselves. "This 'becoming used' to things is a grave illness, a very grave illness, and there is no antibiotic for it," the pope said. "We have to resist this vice of getting used to reading about these tragedies in the newspapers or hearing about them on other media."

In the end, he even apologized for going on so long and in such detail, particularly about what he described as "lagers" — government-run detention centers in Libya where many migrants pushed back from Spain, Malta or Italy end up.

"Excuse me if I have spoken of things as they really are," he said, "but we cannot remain silent and look the other way amid this culture of indifference."

### Looking into eyes, faces

Pope Francis stuck closer to his prepared

text Dec. 5 when he visited Lesbos for the second time, even though before giving his speech, he had spent half an hour walking through the camp, past the tents and pre-fab shelters, greeting hundreds of asylum-seekers.

"I am here to see your faces and look into your eyes: Eyes full of fear and expectancy, eyes that have seen violence and poverty, eyes streaked by too many tears," he told them.

In the presence of Greek President Katerina Sakellaropoulou and Greek and U.N. officials, Pope Francis said the global community has rallied to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change — though perhaps without much success — but it has done very little to come together to assist migrants and the countries hosting them.

"Yet human lives, real people, are at stake!" he said in Lesbos. "The future of us all is at stake, and that future will be peaceful only if it is integrated. Only if it is reconciled with the most vulnerable will the future be prosperous. When

we reject the poor, we reject peace."

While the pope was on the shores of the Mediterranean, it was clear his gaze was broader, and his concern went much further, especially northward where thousands of hope-filled migrants are shivering in a Belarus winter hoping to cross a newly barbed-wired border into Poland.

"Today it is the fashion to put up walls and barbed wire and concertina wire to impede migration," he said.

Certainly, governments have a "right" to say how many migrants they can take in, the pope said. But they do not have a right to condemn them to exploitation and even death.

"Migrants must be welcomed, accompanied, promoted and integrated," Pope Francis said. "If a government cannot take in more than a certain number, it must enter into dialogue with other countries who can take care of the others, all of them."

*Follow Wooden on Twitter: @Cindy\_Wooden*

### Commentary

Continued from Page 6

People are hurting and feeling torn apart.

It would be nice if we could approach this Christmas with great peace of heart and goodwill among all. That likely will not be the case for many.

However, I wonder if it is precisely because of these challenging times, not in spite of them, that Christmas is especially important this year. After all, we are celebrating Emmanuel – God with us – in our own time and circumstances. We are not simply recalling the wondrous birth of more than 2,000 years ago!

Jesus' birth took place in a time of crisis and challenge for many people.

The Hebrew people were overwhelmed by the Roman Empire. They were surrounded by people of different cultures and values. Worship of other gods flourished. They longed for freedom and the right to be their own people. Some wanted to placate Rome while others wanted to rebel!

It was into that era and time that Jesus' birth took place. The Scriptures remind us he was born among the poor, and Joseph and Mary had to flee to protect him. Life was hard. Yet we celebrate his birth as the ultimate sign of hope.

Hope is not some artificial construct of mind that causes people to overlook reality. Instead, hope is all about reality. It admits difficulties even as it reminds people they are

not abandoned or alone.

As I talk to people on the issues of our present day, I discover that many feel they're powerless, abandoned or alone. Some are hanging on to a small branch as they feel they are falling off a cliff.

A mistake that we often make is thinking of hope only in terms of the future. We even say God will protect or God will save. Hope is about the present. Relief is already here in the belief of this season: God truly is with us now.

Interestingly, such belief does not take away the issues at hand. What it does provide is the strength to continue to walk through the various difficulties and concerns. Hope has an element of certainty to it; with the virtue of hope, we intentionally acknowledge that God dwells in this land.

In the weeks before Christmas last year, I was tempted not to put up Christmas decorations in my own house, rather certain that no one else would be visiting or see the tree or manger scene. I was not depressed by that thought, simply aware of reality.

But I chose to decorate as much as other years because I wanted to remember that this wondrous mystery of the Incarnation is real and needs to be celebrated. God truly is with us; we don't want to forget.

*Father Herb Weber is founding pastor of St. John XXIII Catholic Church in Perrysburg, Ohio. His weekly podcast can be found at 23.church.*

### Worship

Continued from Page 4

#### Life in livestream

In the case of livestreamed Masses, Father Manalo said, "one way to look at it is, there's a third space between the church building and our home, accessed through the camera."

There is room for creativity in that third space, he said. Having children read along with Scripture passages during online Mass, typing in our intercessions, messaging fellow parishioners, even placing devotional items around the screen, are all ways to increase our sense of participation.

As a composer, Father Manolo said, he was inspired to include alternative verses to one of his most recent liturgical songs, "Christ's Sacred Presence Knows No Bounds," welcoming those

watching at home.

"If my mother was there," he said, "all of the sudden, they acknowledge her presence, and she's a part of it."

Livestreamed Masses aren't a replacement for physical presence, he said, but they offer advantages, too — to the homebound and to those who are far from home.

"God is especially present in the Eucharist, but he is also present elsewhere," Father Manalo said, noting livestreamed Masses as a tool of evangelization, giving those who have been away from Mass a simple step towards returning.

"In any worship experience, we begin with the encounter. It's there in the story of Moses and the burning bush," he said.

At its heart, the goal of worship is to bring people closer to God, whether within or without four walls.



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# Belarusians urge help for jailed Catholic mother of five

JONATHAN LUXMOORE  
Catholic News Service

WARSAW, Poland — Christians in Belarus have expressed shock at the jailing on contested charges of a Catholic mother with five children, who claimed religious motivation for her actions. A Christian group called her a political prisoner.

Volha Zalatar was imprisoned Dec. 3 for participating in unauthorized tea parties and an internet chat site from her home in Minsk.

"I don't know the basis for the charges against her, or which evidence was used to substantiate them," said Father Yuri Sanko, spokesman for the Belarusian bishops' conference. "Nor do I know whether our Church had anyone present at the trial. A number of priests wrote letters urging an end to her prosecution, but these were ignored."

Meanwhile, Belarus' Christian Vision organization said the 39-year-old sociologist, a practicing Catholic, had been refused a prayer book and pastoral visit by a priest, adding that her lawyer had certified she was beaten, kicked and strangled to force her to divulge phone and internet passwords.

"Volha Zalatar has been sentenced to four years of general-regime prison despite a lack of incriminating evidence, the absurd nature of the charges and being a mother of five children — itself a significant circumstance which should have been taken into account," the organization said in a Dec. 4 statement.

"We share her belief that peace can only be restored in Belarus through active repentance — that is, after the end of persecution and terror and the full restoration of justice. This must include the early release and full exoneration of Zalatar, a political prisoner."

The sentencing of Zalatar, who was



**Volha Zalatar, a Catholic mother of five children, pictured in a Sept. 19, 2020, photo, was sentenced in Belarus to four years in jail for forming an "extremist group" and public order offenses, despite testimony by her lawyer that she'd been tortured and offers by her parish priest to stand surety for her.** (CNS photo/courtesy Axana van der Ra)

arrested in March while taking her daughter to school, was reported by Belarus' unofficial Viasna human rights center, which said she had been convicted under three Criminal Code articles for forming an "extremist organization" and "gross public order violations."

It added that Zalatar had denied all charges during her two-week trial.

Christian Vision described the sentence as "unfair and politically motivated" and said Father Alexander Faminykh, Zalatar's Minsk parish priest, had offered to guarantee she would not flee if she were allowed home.

The group added that it had appealed to the bishops' conference and Vatican nunciature to help resolve the lay Catholic's plight and said the nuncio, Archbishop Ante Jozic, had visited her in detention in June.

The Vatican nunciature told CNS Dec. 7 that it could not comment on Zalatar's case.

"We call on the Belarusian and world Christian community to show solidarity with her and her family, and with all people of faith and nonbelievers imprisoned for political reasons in Belarus."

Conditions have been tense in Belarus since President Alexander Lukashenko's disputed August 2020 reelection after 26 years in power. Human rights groups said that, since then, up to 900 political prisoners have been jailed.

The European Union and other Western governments tightened sanctions in early December, after accusing Belarus of waging a "hybrid war" by encouraging migrants to enter the European Union.

In a courtroom statement, Zalatar described herself as a "caring person, here because I live by God's commandments," and said her case file indicated "ordinary human actions and feelings" had been criminalized and used against her.

"As a mother and Catholic, I stand guard over human dignity and spiritual values — all my actions and statements are determined by love for people and hatred for lies and violence," she said.

"Yet my heart is torn to pieces as the degree of hatred grows, and the pain and resentment escalate. Repentance and mutual forgiveness are the only way to stop the sociopolitical crisis in our country."

Father Sanko told Catholic News Service Dec. 7 the Church's official news website, Catholic.by, had decided not to mention the plight of Catholics like Zalatar, "so as not to run risks or worsen the situation."

He added that pastoral visits to prisoners

*See Sentence, Page 13*

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We  The Power of Hope Every Day

## WHAT WE'VE HEARD

**Anticipation:** Not only is Advent a time for anticipating Christmas, but it's a time for anticipating another birthday — that of Pope Francis, who turns 85 on Friday, Dec. 17. Please continue to pray for him.

**State's best:** The robotics team at St. Bridget School, Richmond, won Virginia's FIRST LEGO League competition Dec. 4-5 in Harrisonburg, and has advanced to the world championship in Houston, April 20-23. The team won the robot performance and champions awards and was nominated for the World Innovation Award for their project to improve the transportation of products using school buses.

**More St. Joseph:** Even though the Year of St. Joseph ended on Dec. 8, thanks to the Knights of Columbus, you can watch a documentary film about him titled "St. Joseph: Our Spiritual Father" at [www.kofc.org/stjoseph](http://www.kofc.org/stjoseph).

**Dressing down for a good cause:** St. Matthew School, Virginia Beach, dressed down on Monday, Nov. 29, in order to help out to help make a difference. Through the fundraising event, they raised \$1,000.41 for Commonwealth Catholic Charities' Afghan Refugee Relief Fund.

**Good people doing good things:** Thanks to a \$40,000 grant from the Beazley Foundation this fall, St. Matthew School has nearly half of the money it needs to cover the cost of replacing the oldest of its three buses.

**Good people doing good things II:** The State Council of the Virginia Knights of Columbus is sponsoring a raffle that will result in a \$20,000 donation to Children's Hospital of Richmond Hematology and Oncology Clinic AND a new car "of your choice" (maximum cost \$50K) for the person with the winning ticket. A \$20 ticket might make a nice Christmas gift — especially if it is the winning ticket. Details at [www.vakofc.org](http://www.vakofc.org).

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

## Sentence

*Continued from Page 12*

remained restricted in Belarus and said he was unsure about the outcome of Archbishop Jozic's June prison visit.

"One of our bishops visited a prison recently to hear the confession and give Communion to a Catholic inmate. But this was subject to tight legal regulations," Father Sanko said.

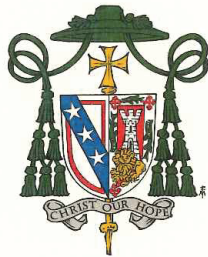
Another prominent Catholic political prisoner, Vitold Ashurak, died of mistreatment last May in a "penalty isolator" at Shklou, without access to medical help, while on a five-year sentence for participating in protests and praying the rosary.

*Editor's note: Updates of this story will be posted on [www.catholicvirginian.org](http://www.catholicvirginian.org).*

## Ringling in Advent



The Joy BRingers from Wakefield help members of St. Jude, Franklin, open Advent by ringing the psalm during Mass on Sunday, Nov. 28. The group, guests of the parish's choir, also performed two additional songs at the conclusion of the celebration. (Photo/Fran Stewart)



Office of the Bishop

## Diocese of Richmond

Advent ~ Christmas 2021

My dear friends,

During the seasons of Advent and Christmas we are invited to reflect upon the many ways in which we have been blessed by God. Our families and friends are usually at the center of our Christmas hopes, expectations, and joyful celebrations. But it is also a time when we seek to widen our circle of friends and family with those who are isolated or neglected as we try to include them in our circle of blessing, too, since we are all part of God's family.

The work of Catholic Charities expresses this love and joyful hope through a staff that is steadfast in serving the needs of so many who lack food, clothing, shelter, guidance, and support on their journey to a brighter future. Catholic Charities of Eastern Virginia and Commonwealth Catholic Charities work throughout our Diocese to serve these people who are most in need.

The special 2<sup>nd</sup> Collection taken up in all the parishes throughout our Diocese on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day is for the work of Catholic Charities, and it is one way we can widen that circle of care. The love that is the center of Christmas is shared more deeply with our most vulnerable brothers and sisters during Advent and throughout the Christmas season.

I want to express my profound thanks to all of you who have so enthusiastically responded to these needs with your support of Catholic Charities. I ask you to continue that generous support this Christmas in the spirit of thanksgiving for God's most wonderful gift of Jesus Christ born to us.

Asking God's abundant blessings upon you and all those you love, at Christmas and throughout the new year, I remain

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Barry C. Knestout  
Bishop of Richmond

**OPPORTUNITIES**

**The Catholic Diocese of Richmond** seeks an assistant digital editor for its Office of Communications. The assistant digital editor is part of the multimedia communications team, to include the *The Catholic Virginian*, and will be responsible for supporting the editor, maintaining editorial content of the diocese's publications across digital and print media, and assisting in the growth of the newspaper's daily digital presence. The Assistant Digital Editor is involved in advancing the engagement of the Catholic audience and readership across the diocese.

A bachelor's degree in English/journalism/mass communications or related field required, and three or more years related experience in the print or communications industry, with diocesan and/or general Catholic press experience preferred. Strong understanding of digital journalism, best practices and the ability to keep abreast of emerging trends.

The successful candidate will be a strong communicator — interpersonally and in writing — and a collaborator. Orientation to detail, ability to manage time, plan, organize and manage projects are a must, as is commitment to maintain confidentiality.

Proficiency using Microsoft Office and AP Stylebook required, and proficiency in Adobe software (InDesign, Photoshop, Acrobat Professional) and Catholic News Service Stylebook is desired. A practicing Catholic with working knowledge of Church structure and Catholic Church teaching is required. The position requires some evening and weekend hours, with possible travel throughout the diocese.

Qualified candidates should forward a cover letter, résumé with links to samples of your work, and completed diocesan application to Kelly Shumate, 7800 Carousel Lane, Richmond, VA 23294. Email [jobs@richmonddioocese.org](mailto:jobs@richmonddioocese.org). Fax 804-622-5163.

**Office Manager/Administrator:** St. Elizabeth Church, a small, dynamic and diverse parish in the heart of Richmond, located in the Highland Park area, is seeking a part-time (10-15 hours/week) office manager/administrator. The office manager must work well with others, have computer skills, including knowledge of Microsoft applications, and will be in charge of keeping track of parish records, sacramental records, VIR-TUS information, ordering supplies and keeping the office environment maintained. The parish office hours are Tuesday through Friday, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Please contact Fr. Jim Arsenault at [jarsenault@richmonddioocese.org](mailto:jarsenault@richmonddioocese.org) to apply.

**SHORTTAKES**

**“The Preacher to the Popes: Raniero Cantalamessa” feature film premiere:** Join others from around the globe for the worldwide premiere of the first feature film about Cardinal Cantalamessa. Learn about the cardinal and his mission to spread the authentic joy and truth of the Gospel. The premiere is free in person and online thanks to generous sponsors. Join us from anywhere online or see the film on the big screen and enjoy the reception afterward at St. Patrick School Theatre, Norfolk, Saturday, Dec. 18, 10 a.m. RSVP via <https://cantalamessamovie.com>.

All are welcome to join **Deacon Charles Williams of the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart** on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land from May 2-11, 2022, for the most deeply moving spiritual experience of your lifetime. A ten-day tour for \$3,599 including airfare, first class hotels, tours, breakfast and dinner, Mass every day in Holy Places and much more. For further information please contact Alba Kim at [tours@albastours.com](mailto:tours@albastours.com) or (804) 298-4035. \*Reservations are available now. Spaces are limited. \*\*COVID-19 policies available upon request.

**St. Elizabeth Catholic Church**, in the Highland Park area of Richmond, will celebrate its centennial in 2023. Bishop Knestout will celebrate Mass on Nov. 20, 2022, and kick off the celebration, which will continue through Nov. 19, 2023. In between, you will have plenty of opportunities to share the history of the parish and recognize the people involved over the past century. If your family has ties to St. Elizabeth Parish, St. Elizabeth Catholic School, St. Joseph Parish and Van De Vyver School, then you are who we are celebrating. Join us! Register online at [https://bit.ly/STECC\\_Bulletin](https://bit.ly/STECC_Bulletin) or contact the parish office by emailing Mary Rose Purcell at [mpurcell@stelizcc.org](mailto:mpurcell@stelizcc.org) or by calling 804-329-4599. If no one answers, leave a message with your information.

**MORE**  
@  
**catholic virginian.org**

**SCRIPTURE SEARCH®**

Gospel for December 19, 2021

*Luke 1: 39-45*

Following is a word search based on the Gospel reading for the Fourth Sunday of Advent, Cycle C: The V. The words can be found in all directions in the puzzle.

|             |            |              |
|-------------|------------|--------------|
| MARY        | TOWN       | HILL COUNTRY |
| ENTERED     | HOUSE      | ZECHARIAH    |
| GREETED     | ELIZABETH  | GREETING     |
| LEAPED      | WOMB       | BLESSED      |
| AMONG WOMEN | FRUIT      | OF MY LORD   |
| SHOULD      | COME TO ME | MY EARS      |
| JOY         |            | BELIEVED     |

**MEETING**

H A I R A H C E Z J O H  
 T I D E L T I U R F A C  
 E L L E A P E D M M A B  
 B Y U L G B K Y O J G E  
 A A O J C M L N E R R L  
 Z D H E A O G E E B E E  
 I E S R R W U E S Y E I  
 L R Y D O H T N A S T V  
 E E D M O I D N T E E E  
 L T E U N L W K F R D D  
 L N S G D O S R A E Y M  
 A E M O T E M O C A N A

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**CHRISTMAS**

[www.wordgamesforcatholics.com](http://www.wordgamesforcatholics.com)

V I A O Z S U S N E C L N L E  
 H I V N O I T H C N B Y I G J  
 J E S S N G A A X A S N A R X  
 N P R I O U W A D O C M B L T  
 E O Q O T Q N U T A O W A E I  
 P A I I D O W C R H X E N U R  
 D B J T G N R N I C A J G N I  
 S E A G A I A S Z A E U E A P  
 M T J P U T I C H B T C L M S  
 L H I H I G N N T E G I S M Y  
 S L K O A M D E Y Z P A O E L  
 T E N M Z S F N S M M H C N O  
 A H R Y N T S R N E O H E R H  
 R E W I S E M E N F R M W R Q  
 P M A O L G G W Q F I P G V D

|              |             |              |
|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| ANGELS       | HEROD       | PRESENTATION |
| ANNUNCIATION | HOLY SPIRIT | SHEPHERD     |
| BETHLEHEM    | HOMAGE      | STAR         |
| CENSUS       | INCARNATION | VISITORS     |
| EMMANUEL     | MAGI        | WISE MEN     |

Look for the crossword puzzle in the next issue of *The Catholic Virginian*.

# El Papa: a ejemplo de José, pasar de las lógicas del enamoramiento al amor maduro

Amar no es pretender que el otro o la vida corresponda con nuestra imaginación; significa más bien elegir en libertad tomar la responsabilidad de la vida, así como se nos ofrece. Es por esto por lo que José nos da una lección importante, elige a María “con los ojos abiertos”. El Papa Francisco en catequesis quiso dirigirse en particular a los recién casados: no terminen el día sin hacer las paces, puesto que la “guerra fría” del día después es “peligrosa”. Un gesto de amor y hacer la paz.

“Los novios cristianos están llamados a testimoniar un amor que tenga la valentía de pasar de las lógicas del enamoramiento a las del amor maduro”, puesto que “amar” no es pretender que el otro o la vida “corresponda con nuestra imaginación”, sino que significa más bien “elegir en plena libertad tomar la responsabilidad de la vida, así como se nos ofrece”. Así el Papa Francisco, en su catequesis del primer miércoles de diciembre y continuando con su reflexión sobre la figura de san José, quiso dar un mensaje a todos los novios. Lo hizo profundizando en características del padre adoptivo de Jesús: su ser “justo” y “desposado de María”.

## José, hombre justo

En los inicios de su reflexión, señaló la utilidad de recordar las costumbres matrimoniales del antiguo Israel para “comprender el comportamiento de José en relación con María”. En aquel entonces, el matrimonio comprendía dos fases, la primera era como un noviazgo oficial, en particular la mujer, incluso viviendo aún en la casa paterna todavía durante un año, era considerada de hecho “mujer” del prometido esposo. El segundo hecho era el traslado de la esposa de la casa paterna a la casa del esposo, con una festiva procesión que completaba el matrimonio. De ahí que “en base a estas costumbres”, el hecho de que «antes de estar juntos ellos, se encontró encinta», exponía a la Virgen a la acusación de adulterio que, según la praxis, imponía el acto de repudio, con consecuencias civiles y penales para la mujer.

*El Evangelio dice que José era “justo” precisamente por estar sujeto a la ley como todo pío israelita. Pero dentro de él el amor por María y la confianza que tiene en ella le sugieren una forma que salva la observancia de la ley y el honor de la esposa: decide repudiarla en secreto, sin clamor, sin someterla a la humillación pública. Elige el camino de la discreción, sin juicio ni venganza.*

## La importancia de sentirse necesitados de la ayuda de Dios

Francisco marcó la diferencia entre actitudes nuestras que, “en cuanto tenemos una noticia folclórica, una noticia mala de otra persona, vamos a la cháchara inmediatamente”, en comparación a las de José, que permaneció “callado”. Sucede que el papá putativo de Jesús, que había escuchado la voz de Dios a través de un sueño “así lo tenía planeado”:

*¡Qué importante es para cada uno de nosotros – observó Francisco – cultivar una vida justa y al mismo tiempo sentirnos siempre necesitados de la ayuda de Dios, para poder ampliar nuestros horizontes y considerar las circunstancias de la vida desde un punto de vista diferente, más amplio!*



El Papa Francisco bendice a un niño después de su catequesis en la audiencia general en el salón Pablo VI en el Vaticano el 1 de diciembre de 2021. (foto de CNS / Yara Nardi, Reuters)

Aunque muchas veces, dijo el Papa, “nos sentimos prisioneros de lo que nos ha sucedido”, precisamente “delante de algunas circunstancias de la vida, que nos parecen inicialmente dramáticas, se esconde una Providencia que con el tiempo toma forma e ilumina de significado también el dolor que nos ha golpeado”.

*La tentación es encerrarnos en ese dolor, en ese pensamiento de las cosas no agradables que nos han pasado. Y eso no es bueno. Eso lleva a la tristeza y a la amargura. El corazón amargado es muy feo.*

## Hay que pasar del enamoramiento al amor maduro

Deteniéndose ante los imprevistos con los que Dios entró en los sueños y expectativas de María y José, que, aunque no sin esfuerzo inicial “abrieron de par en par el corazón” a la realidad ante ellos, el Santo Padre reconoció que “muy a menudo” nuestra vida no es como la habíamos imaginado. Sobre todo, - dijo - en las relaciones de amor, de afecto, nos cuesta pasar de la lógica del enamoramiento a la del amor maduro. Y “hay que pasar del enamoramiento al amor maduro”, afirmó. Dirigiéndose a los recién casados presentes en el Aula, los invitó a pensar que la primera fase del amor, es decir, el enamoramiento, “siempre está marcada por un cierto encanto, que nos hace vivir inmersos en un imaginario que a menudo no corresponde con la realidad de los hechos”. Sin embargo, “es precisamente cuando el enamoramiento con sus expectativas parece terminar” cuando “puede comenzar” o “cuando llega” el amor verdadero:

*Amar de hecho no es pretender que el otro o la vida corresponda con nuestra imaginación; significa más bien elegir en plena libertad tomar la responsabilidad de la vida, así como se nos ofrece. Es por esto por lo que José nos da una lección importante, elige a María “con los ojos abiertos”.*

## El pasaje más demoníaco del Evangelio

Y podemos decir “con todos los riesgos” – añadió el Papa, recordando, inmediatamente, “el reproche” que los doctores de la ley le hacen a Jesús en el Evangelio de Juan: “No somos hijos de ahí”, refiriéndose a la prostitución.

*Como sabían que María se había quedado embarazada, querían ensuciar a la madre de Jesús. Para mí este es el pasaje más sucio y demoníaco del Evangelio. Y el riesgo asumido por*

*José nos da esta lección: tomar la vida como viene. “¿Dios intervino allí? La tomaré”. Y José hace lo que el ángel del Señor le ordenó: «Despertándose José del sueño, hizo como el Ángel del Señor le había mandado, y tomó consigo a su mujer». Y no la conocía, sin convivencia esperaba un hijo, dio a luz un hijo, y le puso por nombre Jesús (cfr. Mt 1,24-25).*

## No terminar el día sin hacer las paces: la guerra fría del día después es peligrosa

Es por ese motivo que el Santo Padre indicó que “los novios cristianos están llamados a testimoniar un amor así”, como el de los padres de Jesús, “que tenga la valentía de pasar de las lógicas del enamoramiento a las del amor maduro”. Se trata de “una elección exigente que, en lugar de aprisionar la vida, puede fortalecer el amor para que perdure ante las pruebas del tiempo”.

*El amor de una pareja va por la vida y madura cada día. El amor del noviazgo es un poco -si se me permite decirlo- romántico. Lo han vivido todos, pero luego llega el amor maduro, el de todos los días, el del trabajo, la llegada de los hijos... Y a veces ese romanticismo desaparece un poco, ¿no? Pero, ¿no hay amor? Sí, pero un amor maduro. “Pero sabe, padre, que a veces nos peleamos...” Esto ha sucedido desde los tiempos de Adán y Eva hasta hoy, ¡que los esposos se peleen es el pan nuestro de cada día! “Pero no deberíamos discutir...” Sí, hay que hacerlo. Se hace. No digo que se deba, pero se puede. “Y Padre, pero a veces levantamos la voz...” - “Eso pasa”. “Y a veces los platos también vuelan” - “Eso pasa”. Pero, ¿cómo lo hacemos para que no dañe la vida del matrimonio? Escuchen con atención: nunca terminen el día sin hacer las paces. Nos hemos peleado, te he dicho cosas malas, Dios mío, te he dicho cosas malas. Pero ahora el día termina: tengo que hacer las paces. ¿Saben por qué? Porque la guerra fría del día siguiente es muy peligrosa. No permitan que el día después comience una guerra. Por eso, hagan las paces antes de irse a la cama. “Pero padre, usted sabe que no sé cómo expresarme para hacer las paces después de la situación tan mala que hemos vivido”. Es muy fácil: haz esto (un gesto) y la paz ya está hecha. Pero recuerden siempre. Recuerda siempre: nunca terminar el día sin hacer las paces. Y esto les ayudará en la vida matrimonial.*

“Este paso del enamoramiento al amor maduro, es una elección exigente”, concluyó Francisco. Pero “es necesario recorrer ese camino”.

También este miércoles el Santo Padre concluyó la catequesis con una oración a San José:

*“San José, tú que has amado a María con libertad, y has elegido renunciar a tu imaginario para hacer espacio a la realidad, ayuda a cada uno de nosotros a dejarnos sorprender por Dios y a acoger la vida no como un imprevisto del que defendernos, sino como un misterio que esconde el secreto de la verdadera alegría. Obtén para todos los novios cristianos la alegría y la radicalidad, pero conservando siempre la conciencia de que solo la misericordia y el perdón hacen posible el amor. Amén.”*

# 'In the midst of sorrow, God is with us'

Following killing of teens, Oxford community prays for healing

MICHAEL STECHSCHULTE  
Catholic News Service

LAKE ORION, Mich. — There were four white candles, each tied with blue-and-gold ribbons, alight in the darkness on the baptismal font at St. Joseph Parish Dec. 5.

One for Hana St. Juliana. One for Justin Shilling. One for Tate Myre. One for Madisyn Baldwin.

The four teens lost their lives in the Nov. 30 shooting tragedy at Oxford High School in Oxford, Michigan. Surrounding the white candles representing them were seven blue ones for those wounded in the shooting: Phoebe Arthur, Jon Ascitutto, Riley Franz, Elijah Mueller, Kylie Ossege, Aiden Watson and Molly Darnell, a teacher.

There were no words that could give comfort to those suffering. But perhaps, in the silence of the second Sunday of Advent, the Lord could instill some healing.

"We recognize that so many of us are tending to the emotional wounds of the trauma that is still there," said Father Jim Kean, pastor of St. Joseph, during the start of an emotional Christmas concert and memorial service at the parish Sunday evening, attended by many of those in the nearby Oxford community.

## 'Not alone'

In the darkness of the church, Father Kean noted the symbolism of the candles held by the parish's young people, which would soon spread light to the rest of the church.

"You see the light grow and fill this place, and it is a good reminder to us," Father Kean said. "Though we saw one horrific action of awful means, we see thousands of actions of heroism, thousands of actions of light. We know that all of our actions tonight build up that process of healing, mindful that we're not doing this alone."

The concert and memorial at St. Joseph were among several held in the communities of Oxford and Lake Orion in the aftermath of the worst school tragedy in Michigan's history. Another vigil took place at Christ the Redeemer Catholic Church, at the south end of Lake Orion, as well as in churches of all denominations throughout the region.

On Dec. 3, more than 5,000 people — including Michigan's governor, congressional representatives and clergy of all stripes — held candles in downtown Oxford to remember the victims and to vow that the tragedy would not define the humble community, previously known as the "gravel capital of the world" and the home of the original Lone Ranger.

Though Oxford's name may be more recognizable because of the events of Nov. 30, residents vowed they would rise above the tragedy.

"We know that there's therapy in the midst of being a healthy community," Father Kean said in an interview with Detroit Catholic, the news outlet of the Detroit Archdiocese. "We're rebuilding, brick by brick, this crumbled edifice of our hearts. That takes time."

## 'People of hope'

Of the seven wounded victims, all but one had been released from the hospital as of Dec. 6, although the emotional and psychological



A young girl holds a candle during a Christmas concert and memorial vigil for victims of the Oxford High School shooting Dec. 5 at St. Joseph Church in Lake Orion, Mich. (CNS photo/Valaurian Waller, Detroit Catholic)

wounds will take much longer to heal, Father Kean said. Although not a St. Joseph parishioner, one of those who died, Myre, played football for St. Joseph's CYO team, Father Kean said, and left an unmistakable mark upon the community.

"Many of his friends are from St. Joseph," Father Kean said. "I've talked with some of those families, and the kids are really coping with the fact that they lost such a good friend."

Over the Dec. 4-5 weekend, victories by the University of Michigan's football team — which honored Myre's family at midfield for the opening coin toss — and the Detroit Lions — who dedicated the game ball to the Oxford community — offered what small consolation they could. But both teams acknowledged it could never be close to enough.

Celebrating Mass at St. Joseph Dec. 5, Detroit Auxiliary Bishop Arturo Cepeda commended the victims to the merciful love of God, urging the community to embrace those who suffer, just as Jesus does.

"As we prepare the way (of Advent), we must never forget who we are," Bishop Cepeda said. "We must never, ever forget that we are here to reach out to those in need. We are a people of hope, the hope that brings about the presence of God in our lives: Emmanuel, God with us."

As Bishop Cepeda officially installed Father Kean as pastor of St. Joseph — a ceremony that had been planned a month in advance — he recalled the parish's compassionate hospitality just a few days prior, with clergy and parishioners welcoming nearly 1,000 students, parents and community members for a Mass of healing just hours after the shooting took place.

"We know at times the way might be difficult, and yet, we are the ones to prepare it," Bishop Cepeda said. "I'm very thankful, on behalf of Archbishop (Allen H.) Vigneron and my brother bishops, priests and deacons, for all of you and the way you have been able

to proclaim the presence of God even in the midst of darkness.

"We are the ones who tell our people that God is in our midst — in the midst of sorrow, in the midst of trouble, in the midst of these trials. God is with us," Bishop Cepeda added. "This is who we are."

## Continue to pray

Father Kean said students and families at St. Joseph have been processing the events at their own pace, and the parish is there to walk with them, no matter what it takes.

"Many are still at the beginning (of the grieving process)," Father Kean said. "It's so raw. We talk about moving forward, but for many, they're not ready yet. And so I'll say, 'OK, let's just go to Mass and find peace in that.'"

Asked how community members can help those reeling from tragedy, Father Kean said the Church's answer is always first to pray.

"When it became obvious by Tuesday evening and Wednesday that the whole country was praying for us, it took your breath away," Father Kean said. "The pain that lingers on will be there for a while, but the prayers are still coming. It's very comforting to know that people are lifting us up, though they may be far away."

Oxford Bank has set up a memorial fund for victims and their families, and to construct a permanent memorial, in addition to various private fundraisers.

The investigation into the shooting is ongoing, with local, state and federal authorities continuing to interview witnesses and school officials.

Ethan Crumbley, a 15-year-old Oxford High School sophomore, has been charged in the shooting, along with his parents, Jennifer and James Crumbley, who were apprehended and arrested Dec. 4. The teen faces charges of first-degree murder and terrorism, while his parents face charges of involuntary manslaughter.