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‘Generous hearts’ make new worship space possible

Bishop dedicates addition at Topping parish

JENNIFER NEVILLE
Special to The Catholic Virginian

You might say that establishing Church of the Visitation (CV), Topping — at which Bishop Barry C. Knestout dedicated a new worship space Saturday, Feb. 26 — entailed a priest on a moped, an appeal to the bishop’s stomach and a lot of tenacity in the 1980s.

You could trace the history a bit further. In the late 1940s, a priest spread the Word in Middlesex County from a truck with a loud-

speaker. In the 1950s and 1960s, a priest from Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, West Point, celebrated summer Masses in this rural area on the Middle Peninsula, which attracts seasonal visitors largely for its proximity to the Rappahannock River.

In the summer of 1980, Father Jack Dougher, a new assistant pastor of St. Therese Church, Gloucester, hopped on his moped and personally canvassed people he thought might be Catholic in the county to determine the feasibility of starting a Catholic church there. At the

time, Catholics living in the 211-square-mile county had to drive to Tappahannock, West Point, Gloucester or Kilmarnock for Mass.

“It was very exciting. We were a small group that spun off,” said Joe Oliva, one of the first CV parishioners. “Starting out, Father Jack Dougher was the pastor. He was a very charismatic guy, and he brought people together. There was a real enthusiasm at that early stage to start something new, and there was a lot of work, a lot of meetings, a lot of discussions.”

Where two or more were gathered

The fledgling parish worshipped at Zoar Baptist Church in Deltaville, Lower Methodist Church in Hartfield and Christchurch School Chapel in Christchurch for the first year. It began renting Freeshade Community Center, Syringa, in October 1981 for Sunday Masses.

There were about 50 year-round people (20 families) at the time, but attendance doubled in the summer months due to tourism. Most committee meetings and social gatherings were scheduled for Sunday as well because the Middlesex Catholic Community was allowed to use Freeshade for the entire day.

Masses for holy days were celebrated at other churches or in parishioners’ homes. Mary Ellen Sherwood, who served on the steering committee for the new parish, fondly remembers a baptism in a park and another in a parishioner’s backyard, and she recalls the

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Bishop Barry C. Knestout blesses members of Church of the Visitation, Topping, during the recessional of the Mass at which he dedicated the parish’s worship space, Saturday, Feb. 25. (Photo/Cindy Jessee)

Listening is key element of Pope Francis’ ministry

Nine years into papacy, it remains integral to his outreach

MARK PATTISON
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Not long after Pope Francis was elevated to the papacy in 2013, someone coined the term “Francis Factor” in an effort to identify those qualities he brought to the chair of Peter that distinguished him from his recent predecessors.

Now, nine years later, it may be the simple act of listening that best characterizes Pope Francis’ ministry more than anything else, according

to panelists at a March 1 forum, “The Francis Factor at Nine Years: Synodality and Solidarity, Reform and Resistance,” sponsored by Georgetown University’s Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life.

“He understands what it means to listen. By his example, he encourages all of us to listen, to listen with an open heart. Listening to one another without prejudice and in listening to our common home is an essential pillar in building a world

of peace, care, and love,” said Sister Alessandra Smerilli, a member of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and interim secretary of the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

“When we listen, and then enter into a dialogue, it enables us to see different perspectives and build on human development, integral view of our world. It is through dialogue and listening that we come to understand the complexities of the issues facing

humanity, from the perspectives of those who suffer the most. We see in Jesus, becoming one of us in order to heal, to save, to express the love of God,” Sister Smerilli said.

“When we listen with an open mind and open heart,” she continued, “we connect the wisdom of others and the different contribution that others can offer to implementing solutions. This is a message that resonates across the Church and also beyond the Church.”

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CHRIST OUR HOPE
MOST REV. BARRY C. KNESTOUT

This past weekend, I traversed the diocese — Saturday morning at Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Salem; Saturday afternoon at St. Mary, Richmond; and Sunday afternoon at the Basilica of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Norfolk — to celebrate the Rite of Election with more than 200 catechumens from more than 60 parishes. This rite marks their entry into the final phase of preparation to receive the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil.

Larger dioceses have the practice of bringing together in a convention center or large church all who will be entering the Church at Easter. Our diocese is too geographically extended to allow for that. Thus, we celebrate this occasion in each vicariate region on the First Sunday of Lent.

One of the beauties of the Rite of Election, and something which is a hallmark of how we, as a Church, celebrate, is that we do it as a community. When our catechumens, their sponsors and others associated with the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults gather as the Body of Christ, there is excitement.

Something we have learned through youth ministry activities, and something which is evident in the impact of our annual Diocesan Youth Conference, is that our young people are energized in the practice of their faith when they recognize that they are not alone. It is not only in small groups that they experience and share the faith, but also in the context of a larger number of their peers who are experiencing and expressing the same thing they are. From that larger community comes encouragement, strength and a willingness to give witness to their faith, to live it and to grow in it.

In essence that is why the Church asks us to gather at times like the Rite of Election — a time when the bishop calls multiple communities together in order that in this larger body, we experience *communio*, i.e., the communion of the faithful that extends beyond one's parish. It is important that we see, in a tangible way, that we are part of something much greater. We are part of our diocesan Church and our universal Church.

As catechumens respond to God while on their path of faith and discernment toward joining the Church, it is not uncommon that they might feel alone or isolated. They should know that there are many — be they in another part of the diocese, country or world — who

are praying for them, supporting them and walking with them.

That is why when the priest sends catechumens from Mass after the homily to further study Scripture, he does so with words that assure them of the worshiping community's prayers and support.

During the Rite of Election, I asked the clergy, catechists and sponsors if the catechumens have listened to the Word of God and if they have participated in the prayer of the Church. The response was an overwhelming, "Yes!"

I then asked the catechumens if it is their will to become part of the Body of Christ — the Church. Again, an overwhelming, "Yes!" This was followed by presenting their names written in their parish's Book of the Elect.

Be they at in-person celebrations of Mass, the administration of the sacraments or the Rite of Election, our Church needs tangible experiences of the larger community of faith. The Holy Spirit supports and encourages us — as a faith community — to be together, to walk with each other and to grow closer to God.

Let us take time this Lent to pray for the catechumens — now known as the elect — who will join us in Eucharist this Easter. Pray that they remain steadfast in their commitment during the final steps of this faith journey.

Cathedral celebrates blessing of new tabernacle

KRISTEN L. BYRD

Special to The Catholic Virginian

The Blessed Sacrament has a new home in the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart.

On Sunday, Feb. 20, Bishop Barry C. Knestout blessed the tabernacle that is secured on an oak pedestal on top of a three-step oak platform behind the altar. The tabernacle and pedestal are framed by an opening in the ironwork above them.

During his homily, the bishop noted the importance of having the tabernacle in this location.

"The placing of the tabernacle here in the sanctuary, in the chancel, is an architectural

detail that could be resolved or arranged in many other ways," he said. "For us today, however, it becomes a physical reminder of the centrality of God in our lives and the desire we each must receive and allow the Holy Spirit to dwell at the center of our hearts and lives."

The refurbished, bronze tabernacle, with etchings of grapes and other fruit, is painted with red enamel. Purchased from St. Joseph Catholic Church, a parish in Hanover, Pennsylvania, which had closed, it is over three-and-a-half feet high and weighs 240 pounds.

The tabernacle replaces one that had been on loan from Catholic Campus Ministry and which was considered too small for the sanc-

tuary, according to Father Anthony Marques, cathedral rector. It has been returned to the CCM chapel.

Echoing Bishop Knestout, Father Marques highlighted the placement of the tabernacle. "The installation of the new tabernacle in the center of the sanctuary helps to restore the architectural integrity of the cathedral and emphasizes that the Eucharist is the center of our lives," he said.

At the beginning of Mass, Bishop Knestout blessed the new cathedra (the bishop's chair) that sits atop a three-step platform on the left side of the sanctuary facing the pulpit. The

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The new tabernacle is anchored to a pedestal in the sanctuary of the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart. Bishop Barry C. Knestout blessed it during Mass on Sunday, Feb. 20.



Deacon Chris Malone incenses Bishop Barry C. Knestout as the latter takes his place on the newly repositioned cathedra during Mass on Feb. 20, at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart. (Photos/Martin Nguyen)

'Transformative journey' for parish's centennial

Blessed Sacrament, Norfolk, celebration includes 100 hours of eucharistic adoration

WENDY KLESCH

Special to The Catholic Virginian

A journey of 100 years so often begins with a single leap of faith.

Blessed Sacrament, Norfolk, celebrated its centennial anniversary this year, beginning with a six-mile pilgrimage last May and concluding with 100 hours of eucharistic adoration followed by a celebratory Mass on Sunday, Feb. 20.

"The challenge for us has been the pandemic," Deborah Alberti, chair of the centennial committee, said. "Finding things we could do safely and still be in community."

"There were times when I thought we should put it off for a year," she said. "But I'm glad that we went ahead. You could get lost in all that's going on now. It's been just what we needed — time to renew our faith, to rediscover our past. A truly joyous year."

Rediscovered treasures

Pastoral associate Alfie Martinez-Coyle began the year by delving into the parish's past, she said, asking parishioners to send in old photographs — of the parish school, which closed in 1988; of the current church, built in 1965; and of the original Blessed Sacrament, a small stone church on Colley Ave. that was built at the parish's founding in 1921.

The call yielded a surprising result, she said, when parish staff noticed something familiar about the crucifix depicted in a mid-century wedding photograph that had been taken inside the old Blessed Sacrament.

"It's the crucifix that we've had hanging in the confessional for years," she said. "We didn't have the slightest idea that it dated to the original church."

The wooden crucifix was sent for restoration and now hangs on the wall of the sanctuary, once more a part of the Mass.

A search of the vestry revealed other pieces of the past, she said, including candlesticks from the old church and chalices engraved with the names of former pastors.



Father Eric Ayers, pastor of Blessed Sacrament, Norfolk, center, and Deacon Derek Turrietta, left, along with altar servers and parishioners attending adoration, kneel before the Blessed Sacrament prior to the parish's celebratory centennial Mass, Sunday, Feb. 20. (Photo/Andrea Petras)

The artifacts, along with donated photographs and mementoes, were displayed in the parish hall during an after-Mass reception, creating a special place to reflect — and to search for photos of friends and family.

"It's amazing, the history that we've uncovered," Martinez-Coyle said, "the history that's been right here, all around us, all along."

A time to grow

Over the past year, the centennial committee has worked to find unique ways of helping parishioners grow in faith and service, with a particular eye toward activities that could be done outside or "together at home."

"An integral part of Blessed Sacrament, when it started, was that we did a lot of great outreach to the poor," Martinez-Coyle said, "and we wanted to get back to the roots of that."

As part of these efforts, volunteers planted a Centennial Garden behind the church, she said, growing fresh vegetables for community food pantries.

The celebrations also included an art contest, allowing children and adults the chance to grow in creativ-

ity and to express their love for their parish home.

Parishioner George Koehl entered the contest with a composition made from two photographs photo-shopped into one, setting a picture of the stained-glass windows of the church's 2002 renovation inside the arched doorway of the original Blessed Sacrament.

"I'm not sure how I noticed how well the two shapes fit together," he said with a laugh. "I suppose the Lord must have put the idea in my head."

100 hours of adoration

"It's been a transformative journey," Deacon Derek Turrietta said. "We started the year with a prayer pilgrimage — a sort of exterior pilgrimage — and we concluded with an interior pilgrimage."

As the capstone of its centennial celebrations, Blessed Sacrament hosted 100 hours of eucharistic adoration, beginning the morning of Wednesday, Feb. 16, and concluding prior to the beginning of Mass on Sunday.

"Canon law requires at least two people be present, and we've had full coverage for all 100 hours," Deacon Turrietta said, with about

300 participants in all.

"We particularly wanted to encourage families with young children to attend," Melissa Mark of the parish council said.

Children who attended were entered into a raffle for a gift basket, and the parish offered special family-friendly hours.

The organizers also understood, she said, that adoration can be daunting for adults who might not be familiar with the practice.

"We tried to tell people, 'you can read a book, you can journal,'" she said. "It's a time to fill your cup and to reflect."

Giving the community a special time to be still, to sit before the Eucharist and to dwell with Christ was a particularly fitting way to end the year, Deacon Turrietta said.

"Adoration takes us back to where it all really begins, right back to our name," he said. "Blessed Sacrament."

Font of grace

"I hope that our celebrations have helped make us more aware of the gifts and the sacrifices of those who have gone before us," said Father Eric Ayers, pastor of Blessed Sacrament, during the celebratory Mass, "and that our remembrances have inspired us to continue the good work that was begun 100 years ago."

In the midst of difficult times, the Church stands as an oasis of faith, he said, a font of God's grace.

Just as in the Book of Ezekiel the prophet sees water flowing out from the Temple of the Lord — a small trickle that grows ever deeper as it rolls along, watering the riverbank until it empties into the salt sea, making it fresh, so it is with God's grace.

"The lesson is, it doesn't matter how small it starts," he said.

One baptism. Twelve disciples. One leap of faith. One parish in a city on the bay.

"If God's grace is the source, it will grow," Father Ayers said. "May this church continue to be a temple of God's presence and grace for the community."

Cathedral

Continued from Page 2

"Ceremonial of Bishops" instructs that the cathedra "stands alone and is permanently installed. Its placement should make it clear that the bishop is presiding over the whole community of the faithful" (47).

"The sanctuary furnishings are not just beautiful adornments; they also express Catholic beliefs," said Father Marques. "This new arrangement highlights the bishop's

role as the shepherd and teacher of the local Church or diocese."

Much of the funding for the \$44,900 tabernacle and cathedra projects was provided by the Tom and Glory Sullivan Foundation, Inc. These are part of the ongoing improvements that have been made at the cathedral in recent years, including a new bell tower roof and new security system, as well as making restrooms ADA-compliant.

Noting the significance a cathedral has in a diocese, Father Marques related a story about

when the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart was dedicated in 1906. Archbishop John J. Keane, archbishop of Dubuque, Iowa, who served as the fifth bishop of Richmond, stated, "The ministrations of divine truth and divine grace that shall hallow this sanctuary for all the future shall have that above all else for their meaning and their purpose, to draw all men, without distinction, closer to the Heart of Christ, and thereby to draw them in fraternal charity closer to one another. May this twofold divine

love be, not only to the people of Richmond, but to the people of the Old Dominion, a fountain of most precious blessings both for time and for eternity; and may generations yet unborn bless and thank God for the day when their cathedral was consecrated to the Heart of Jesus."

Father Marques added, "Those who worship in the cathedral today belong to one of those 'generations yet unborn' that Archbishop Keane mentioned. Now it is our turn to bless and thank God in our beautiful cathedral church."

Topping

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“honky-tonk-sounding piano” that plinked out the hymns at Freeshade.

When Bishop Walter F. Sullivan went to Middlesex on Feb. 6, 1982, to discuss plans for a new church, they met at a parishioner's home where they served oyster stew, a favorite of his. He gave the nod for the Middlesex Catholic Community to be a mission of St. Therese Church and officially designated the parish Church of the Visitation in July 1983. It now has 135 households, which amounts to approximately 300 parishioners.

Father Gerald Kaggwa, the pastor and a native of Uganda, said most people moving to Middlesex are retirees, so a challenge for the parish is to attract younger parishioners. The county itself had only 10,625 residents in the 2020 census, approximately 32% of whom were 65 or older, according to the U.S. Census Bureau website.

Space solely for worship

CV's first church was a multipurpose building when it was dedicated in September 1985. The worship space was also used for social events and had a kitchen and bathrooms. An education wing was added in 1991.

In September 2008, the nave was expanded, and a daily Mass chapel, administration wing and additional bathrooms were added. The new space seats 283 and is the first space dedicated solely to worship.

The parish used an existing building fund and raised \$500,000 through a capital campaign and a memorial donations campaign to pay for the project. It also has a 15-year, \$185,000 loan, said Ray Kostaskey, church administrator.

“To me, it's an amazing accomplishment for a mission church to complete two major construction projects with no help from anybody other than our own parishioners,” Kostaskey said.

“It appears anytime you would ask our parishioners for a real, valid need, they respond beautifully,” Kostaskey continued. “Even though we are a mission church, people dig down deeply for needy projects.”

'Looks more as a church'

The \$1.6 million addition includes a confessional and the installation of 14 stained glass windows, 11 of which are in the worship space. The new space also has new pews with kneelers and a baptismal font made by parishioner Tom Shoemaker. An ambo and altar made by parishioners Matthew and Ben Sherwood replaces the altar made by their father, Paul Sherwood, years ago. That one will be used to hold the tabernacle once used by the Little Sisters of the Poor in Richmond.

“The whole shape and structure — it looks more as a church,” said Father Kaggwa. “When you enter there, you know you are entering a church.”

Ground was broken on the nave Nov. 20, 2020, and the first Mass was celebrated Jan. 30, 2022.

Kostaskey said he was overwhelmed with the beauty of the church.

“I just became tearful for a moment when I was looking at it, and I'm a 30-year Marine” he said.

In his homily, Bishop Knestout noted that the addition was “vital work of any parish, to provide an ongoing presence, sure footing, and stable foundation for families of faith to be formed, grow and mature.” He continued, “This worship space offers shelter, a beautiful environment, and a suited setting to assist us to



The choir at Church of the Visitation, Topping, provided the music for the Mass at which Bishop Barry C. Knestout dedicated the worship space on Saturday, Feb. 25. (Photo/Cindy Jessee)

follow Christ in his Paschal Mystery.”

Solemnity for the church

Having a separate worship area will make life easier now that the room doesn't have to be rearranged for funerals and social events, but the addition also adds more solemnity to the church, parishioners said.

As parishioner Don Delagrang, building committee chair, explained, the existence of an entranceway in front of the new church sets a more sacred tone.

“When the multi-purpose room was used, people tended to talk with each other before the service, and they had to ring the bells to get everyone seated and quiet,” he said. “Now people socialize in the narthex outside the worship space and are quiet once in. It's just a nice, quiet, solemn area that you go into, and it prepares you for church, prepares you for the service.”

Serena Beckett, organist, agreed that a separate worship space is important.

“It's huge for me. I come from a very traditional background, and that's my preference liturgically as well,” she said. “It creates a higher atmosphere of reverence that there's just so much more potential for getting into the right space and frame of mind for praying and worshipping in the first place.”

Socializing in the old worship area had become such a norm that Shoemaker said he was surprised by the congregation's “chatting” before the liturgy when he and his wife attended Mass there for the first time in 2005 while visiting the area. The next time they attended, it was announced that it was “Social Sunday,” meaning there would be a reception after the Mass. His wife, JoAn, leaned over and jokingly said, “I thought every Sunday was social Sunday.”

'Generous hearts'

Parishioners described the parish as welcoming, friendly and like a family. That atmosphere is what prompted Don and Sandi Delgrang to convert to Catholicism after visiting the parish in 2015. At the beginning of the Mass, they stood when first-time visitors were asked to do so, and after Mass several people introduced themselves.

“At that point in our lives, we had tried several different churches in the area to see where we wanted to join and belong,” Sandi said. “After Mass, so many of the parishioners came up and welcomed us, introduced themselves, made us feel welcome. That was why we chose to join here. It feels like family at this church.”

Father Kaggwa also said the parishioners

“love one another” and are “like family.”

“Being a small parish is special because you come to know people more and more, so you are involved in their lives and you know them almost on a personal level,” Father Kaggwa said. “They are very generous people in everything. They are generous in their hearts. They are very good. That's where I can say it is special.”

Editor's note: Parish history was taken from church website, parish materials and the Diocese of Richmond bicentennial book, “Shine Like Stars.”

'Be sensitive' to military families, archbishop says

WASHINGTON — In the midst of pastoral visits to Wyoming and Colorado, Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services, urged fellow bishops to “be sensitive” to the families of U.S. military personnel recently deployed to Europe.

“I can feel the tension and the uncertainty” among families, he said in a statement released March 1 by the archdiocese, which is based in Washington.

“The world watches in horror as one European nation invades another and we cry out: When will the insanity cease? In the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA, the concern is immediate,” he said of the families of those deployed.

Since early February, the Pentagon has deployed 14,000 U.S. troops, primarily in Lithuania, Poland and Romania in response to the Russian buildup of military forces and eventual invasion of Ukraine Feb. 24.

Many of the soldiers are active in civilian parishes and schools, Archbishop Broglio said, adding, “They need support, interest and prayerful concern.”

The archbishop also acknowledged the need to pray for peace “for an end to the aggression against the good people of Ukraine.”

“I cannot help but to remember the many Catholics of the Ukrainian eparchies in our country who must have families and friends now caught up in a senseless war,” he said.

“May Our Lady of Peace intercede for us!” the statement concluded.

Speaker advises women to ‘put on full armor of God’

Chesapeake parish event welcomes those who’ve been away from Church

WENDY KLESCH
Special to The Catholic Virginian

It was an evening of friendship, faith and renewal. A time to shine a little pink party light in the darkness.

The Walking with Purpose women’s Bible study of St. Stephen, Martyr, Chesapeake, invited the women of Hampton Roads to come together Friday, Feb. 25, for an event featuring Laura Phelps, author of “Victorious Secret: Everyday Battles and How to Win Them.”

“We wanted to give the gathering an air of a ‘girls’ night out,” ministry co-coordinator Ann Emsley said, explaining how the team worked to give the parish commons a festive flair, with balloons, flowers and dessert trays with which to greet the crowd of 450.

“Over the past few years, many have taken a step away from the Church,” Brooke Fitzharris, ministry co-coordinator said, “and may or may not be coming back. So we asked, ‘What can we do that would make them feel welcome? That would appeal to that sense of, ‘This is something that would be fun to do with a friend’?”

Warm welcome home

The St. Stephen ministry chose to invite Phelps, a speaker, author and Connecticut mother of four, because of her inspirational message of finding hope and even humor amid life’s daily struggles.

“We always think that we live in this vortex where there’s only joy or only sorrow,” Fitzharris said. “But they can happen concurrently. You can walk the path, holding the hand of both of them.”

Emsley cast the net wide, she said, searching the websites of churches and parochial schools for email addresses, sending, in the end, a flyer along with a personalized message to 987 people.

“It was important to us to open it up, so that people who have been away would feel welcome,” she said.

The group was happily overwhelmed by the response, with hundreds of women across Hamp-

ton Roads and beyond registering for the event.

The principal of Our Lady of Mount Carmel School, Newport News, Dominican Sister Anna Joseph, offered to buy tickets for her teachers, about 15 of whom got together for dinner and to attend the talk.

“I haven’t done anything like this for a while,” OLMC teacher Brittany May said. “I was interested to see what encouragement we could draw from it.”

Message of resilience

“Does anyone remember Red Rover?” Phelps asked, as she addressed the assembly, recalling the childhood game in which two teams hold hands to form two chains.

The object? To run at the opposing team’s arms so hard that you break through their linked hands.

“It’s a terrible game,” Phelps said, amid laughter. “We all knew how to win. You go for the smallest, skinniest girl on the other team.”

But, Phelps said, there was also another path to victory: to aim at the girl who was afraid, who would let go of the hand in hers.

“How would I know this?” she asked. “Because I was the girl who was afraid.”

“I almost threw away everything I love because I didn’t realize I was in a spiritual battle,” she said.

The devil is not, as is often depicted in the popular imagination, prancing around with a pitchfork, she said. Rather, he is standing on the opposite line of a game of Red Rover, looking for the weak link in the chain — for the moment “we might feel unseen, unloved. For that moment when we feel we deserve better.”

“How do you fight your battles?” she asked. “Do you let go? Or are you the girl who stands firm?”

What is your battle?

Every battle is different, Phelps said. In a gathering of hundreds of women, there are hundreds of stories — of victories and defeats.

Finding your own battle means staying vigilant, looking for what is trying to separate you from Christ, Phelps said.

Hopelessness. Dissatisfaction. A resigned sense of “it is what it is.”

Phelps recounted how her crisis came during a time of financial struggle and marital stress.

“My life looked nothing like I imagined it would, and I became increasingly aware of a sense of disappointment. And disappointment has a weight to it.”

She found herself looking more and more to social media for consolation and approval — a temptation common today — living in a digital dream world rather than facing her battles, fully inhabiting her own life.

But, even at our lowest ebbs, she said, “Christ never lets go of our hands.”

Strength in God’s Word

Phelps has found strength in studying Scripture, she said, and she encourages other women to do the same.

God’s Word has helped her, in the spirit of Ephesians 6, to put on the full armor of God, she said — the belt of truth, the shield of faith, and shoes eager to spread the gospel of peace. To follow the call to, “having done everything else, to stand.”

“Do you ever feel like that?” Phelps asked. “I don’t know what to do; I’ve tried everything!” Well. Now you know. Put on your sandals of peace and stay put.”

We are called to stand firm in Christian hope, she said, in the joyful expectation that God’s promises will be fulfilled.

“No matter how my story ends,” she said, “I no longer see my battles as problems.”

Each everyday battle is an opportunity to grow strong in faith, to hold tighter to the hand in ours. Because the story is in the stand.

“I just imagine that Jesus is placing one more piece of metal on me. That he is saying, ‘This is my daughter. She’s mine,’” Phelps said. “‘And this is one more piece of armor that will make her strong.’”

Catholic leaders plead for clemency for Texas woman

CAROL ZIMMERMANN
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Texas Catholic leaders and other opponents of the death penalty are urging Texas officials to grant clemency to a 53-year-old Latina woman set to be executed in late April.

Melissa Lucio, a Catholic mother of 14, was given the death sentence for the 2007 death of her 2-year-old daughter, Mariah, which Lucio has maintained was due to her daughter’s accidental fall down a stairway.

The Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops urged Texas Gov. Greg Abbott and the state’s Board of Pardons and Paroles to commute Lucio’s April 27 death sentence and “reexamine the case to consider her history as a victim of sexual abuse,” along with the “troubling interrogation by law enforcement and the lingering questions regarding the manner” of her daughter’s death.

On Feb. 28, the state’s bishops said Lucio’s sentence was based on a flawed process that lacked evidence

and witnesses. They also said she was convicted based on a coerced, passive admission of guilt after a rigorous interrogation the night her daughter died.

The bishops said Lucio has “undertaken a spiritual journey while in prison” with her spiritual adviser, Deacon Ronnie Lastovica of the Diocese of Austin.

They also expressed agreement with the statement of Bishop Daniel E. Flores of Brownsville, where the Lucio family lives.

“One tragedy is not somehow made better by killing someone else. Justice is not suddenly restored because another person dies,” Bishop Flores said. He added that “executing Melissa will not bring peace to her surviving children, it will only bring more pain and suffering.”

The bishop said Lucio’s case “illustrates yet again why the Texas death penalty process cannot be trusted to provide justice to all. It is a deeply flawed process rife with human error and inconsistency.”

“We continue to pray for everyone who has been touched by the tragic loss of Mariah’s life, especially for the suffering Melissa and her family have endured,” he added. He said a meaningful review of this case could enable the family “to continue the hard work of restorative justice and healing.”

Krisanne Vaillancourt Murphy, executive director of Catholic Mobilizing Network, similarly urged state officials to grant Lucio clemency, saying: “To do anything else would be an irreversible injustice.”

In a court appeal filed in February, Vanessa Potkin, an attorney for Lucio and director of special litigation at the Innocence Project, said: “There is just too much doubt. We cannot move forward in this case and risk executing an innocent woman.”

Attorneys for Lucio have sought relief multiple times to no avail. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit said Lucio had been denied her right to fully defend herself but that procedural rules barred the court from overturning her conviction. The Supreme Court

has declined to take up Lucio’s case.

If Texas goes through with her execution, Lucio will be the sixth woman to be executed in the United States in the past 10 years and the only Latina woman to be sentenced to death in Texas. Her case was the subject of a documentary: “The State of Texas vs. Melissa.”

A broad coalition, including domestic violence and battered women’s organizations and former prosecutors, has expressed support for Lucio’s innocence.

The Innocence Project, in a brief filed with the Supreme Court, questioned the manner of interrogation used on Lucio about her daughter’s death.

“Interrogation may sometimes psychologically pressure even innocent people to confess to crimes they did not commit,” it said, adding that the risk of a false confession is “heightened when the interrogated suspect is a battered woman.”

Follow Zimmermann on Twitter: @carolmaczim

Let your Lenten journey affect world's brokenness

GUEST COMMENTARY
EFFIE CALDAROLA
CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

Lent began just as we watched in horror the Russian invasion of Ukraine. As the world watches evil unleashed upon the forces of democracy in a European country, it somehow seems fitting that Christians move into a penitential season.

Unlikely heroes are emerging. News reports show a white-haired woman in her 60s, nails well-manicured and lacquered, practicing firing a large rifle to help defend her country. The president of Ukraine, a former comedian, told the U.S. when they offered to evacuate him, “I need ammunition, not a ride.”

As I write this, Volodymyr Zelenskyy is still alive and fighting. Pray God, when you read this, he will still be the president. But we know the Russians have him and his democratic government in their sights.

How does this affect our Lenten journey, and how, perhaps, can our Lenten journey affect the world’s brokenness?

To a Christian, these questions can never be separated. We’ve been called to bring the king-

dom of God, never to hide away solely in our own world of religiosity and private devotion.

In the February days leading up to Lent, many of the daily readings were from the Letter of James. Many of the readings struck me as important and bold, and I decided to read more of James.

The letter, only five chapters, is full of practical advice: We should be quick to listen and slow to speak, James says. That in itself would be a worthwhile Lenten endeavor.

He impresses upon us that a faith not expressed in good works is no faith at all. And he challenges us to think about class distinctions: James asks us to imagine “if a man with gold rings on his fingers and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and a poor person in shabby clothes comes in.” We might envision our own Sunday Mass congregation.

How are the two treated, James asks. Such a simple question, and yet one that we all should ask ourselves. Who is given the best seat at table, in our society, in our own lives? James’ letter is very hard on the rich.

We make plans for our lives, James says, but much like the Ukrainians who went on about their lives calmly in the days before the inva-

sion, we don’t know what tomorrow will bring. “You,” James writes, “are a puff of smoke that appears briefly and then disappears.”

This may be a somber thought, but each of us goes the way of all flesh, and Lent offers us the opportunity to contemplate what we are doing with this brief but precious time we have been given.

In his famous poem, “As Kingfishers Catch Fire,” the Jesuit priest Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote, “What I do is me: for that I came.”

Our actions prove who we are, more than any fine statements or boasts, more than our degrees, our accomplishments, our riches.

Who are we? We ask Jesus to help us answer this question during Lent. Why did we come?

I think of President Zelenskyy, a young man in his 40s, a performer in his early life. Now, he has become the focal point of resistance to an evil assault affecting millions of people in his country, and perhaps beyond. This, perhaps, is the moment for which he came.

Meanwhile, Jesus invites us to draw nearer. By deepening our prayer, extending our charity, perhaps to Catholic Relief Services’ humanitarian efforts in Ukraine, and strengthening ourselves with penance, perhaps we can better answer the question Jesus asks: Why did you come?

Discouraged by ‘Catholic legalism’

I read with alarm the recent decision by the Phoenix Diocese declaring invalid the baptisms celebrated by Father Arango because of a one-word deviation in form.

What does this decision communicate to faithful Catholics, to inactive Catholics and to those who have serious doubts about becoming Catholic?

Once again Catholicism is presented as legalistic and dogmatic, elevating the legal form of a sacrament over the sacrament’s purpose of serving the needs of persons, placing liturgical law over the mission of reconciliation.

My son called my attention to this decision. Like so many young adults, he questions the mindset of the Church and whether he could be an authentic Christian and, in addition, Catholic. At this time of synodal dialogues, can we allow the Lord to remind us that the sacrament, like the sabbath, was made for man, not man for the sacrament? [Mk 2:27]

I converted to Catholicism at age 33; I had been baptized at age 9 within the Baptist tradition. When confirmed, no one asked whether my baptism was valid, what words were used, and no one challenged the obvious fact that my pastor who baptized me was not a priest.

How can my baptism be accepted as valid and

the baptism of so many be challenged because of a lack of formality?

I would argue that even if invalid, the sacrament is still efficacious. And what of the tradition to honor the baptism of desire, the baptism of intent or the baptism of martyrs?

I find this display of Catholic legalism discouraging.

— **Deacon Melvin Dowdy**
Richmond

‘Open up the Catholic Church in America’

In September 1952, a Korean War veteran asked me to drive him to the Maryknoll seminary at Clark’s Summit in Scranton, Pennsylvania. The large class of entering seminarians was comprised mostly of WWII and Korean War vets. Four years later, my friend called me to say that he was leaving the seminary to return to civilian life.

“My class is down to a handful,” he said. “The Catholic Church is losing the finest group of American men I’ve ever known simply because it does not allow priests to marry.”

Now, some 60-plus years later, the Catholic Church in America is on the ropes from cultural change, Church scandals and now COVID. It badly needs a jumpstart.

It is time we have both married priests and a diaconate wide open to women. The U.S. Conference

of Catholic Bishops should make this a pressing issue in the ongoing synod.

Open up the Catholic Church in America. It’s what a vast majority of the Catholic laity wants for the 21st century.

— **Ret. Captain Jim Mulligan, USN**
Virginia Beach

VAERS provides vaccine injury reports

In response to questions in letters to the editor on Jan. 24, the U.S. government has the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System. VAERS collects reports of injuries and deaths after any vaccine was injected into anyone. It is a felony to make a false report, but apparently no crime to not make a report at all.

VAERS has over 1 million reports of injuries following COVID-19 vaccinations and over 21,000 deaths. Most vaccine injuries or deaths are not reported because most medical professionals are either unaware of VAERS or discouraged from making a report by superiors. A VAERS report requires about 30 minutes of a medical professional’s time.

Go to vaers.hhs.gov to access reports of vaccine injuries.

— **David White**
Roseland

Discuss other issues on ‘Views’ page

After reading the multiple letters to the editor in the Feb. 7 issue of The Catholic Virginian that relate contra-

dictory findings, I am driven to write.

I have reviewed the CDC website referred to and cannot locate figures as quoted by Ms. Curley and Mr. Lineberry. I do know that we will soon approach 1 million COVID deaths in the USA.

The issue is not whether one has the right to be vaccinated or not, but the dissemination of plus/minus accurate data to others to support this decision.

I urge The Catholic Virginian, for the sake of providing the most accurate

data to its readers, engage, if possible, a public health expert from the University of Virginia, Georgetown or other medical center to state the CDC statistics and to bring an end to further “opinion pieces.”

This could and should be short and to the point. Just the facts. It will serve to move the running battle of opinions to the sidelines and permit discussion on the letter page of a wide range of other issues.

— **Paul Schellhammer, MD**
Virginia Beach

CV letters policy

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

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Sister Cora Marie Billings reflects on 66 years of religious life

Served at St. Elizabeth, led diocese's Office for Black Catholics for 25 years

SYDNEY CLARK
Catholic News Service

In 1956, 17-year-old Sister Cora Marie Billings of Philadelphia entered the Sisters of Mercy in Merion, Pennsylvania, becoming the first Black member of the Philadelphia community.

Catholicism has always been a part of Sister Billings' life, coming from a devout Black Catholic family who fought against racial barriers to fully participate in the Catholic faith and tradition.

Her great-grandfather was enslaved by the Jesuits at Georgetown University in Washington. His 11 siblings also were enslaved. They were baptized Catholic, and their baptismal records are at Holy Trinity Church in Georgetown.

Sister Billings was the third person in her family to enter religious life. In the 1940s, two of her aunts became members of the first successful Black Catholic order in the United States, the Oblate Sisters of Providence, founded in 1828 by Mother Mary Lange. Her aunts couldn't join other congregations at the time due to segregation.

Sister Billings said the spirit of her aunts, Sister Mary Paul (formerly Susan Lee) and Sister Mary Agnes (formerly Bertha Lee), her ancestors and her strong devotion to Mary and St. Martin de Porres have remained with her throughout her six-decade career as a Black Catholic nun and given her the strength to combat various challenges throughout her life.

In addition to desegregating the Sisters of Mercy Philadelphia chapter, she has achieved several "firsts."

She was the first African American to teach in an all-white grade school in Levittown, Pennsylvania, as well as the first African American sister to teach in a Catholic high school in Philadelphia.

She was the first Black sister to work as a campus minister at Virginia State University and the first African American sister to lead a U.S. Catholic parish, working as a pastoral coordinator at St. Elizabeth Parish in North Richmond, Virginia.

She also led the Richmond Diocese's Office for Black Catholics for 25 years and served as director of the Human Rights Council for Virginia from 2007 to 2010. Billings is also a founding member of the National Black Catholic Sisters' Conference.

In a Q-and-A interview with Global Sisters Report, Sister Billings discussed her faith, childhood upbringing, call to action for the Catholic Church and more.

Q: What/who drew you to join the Sisters of Mercy versus a historically Black religious order?



Shannen Dee Williams, right, a scholar well known for her work highlighting the contributions of Black Catholic women religious and the racism they have experienced, presents Mercy Sister Cora Marie Billings with an honorary doctorate at Villanova University's commencement ceremony in May 2019. (CNS photo/courtesy Villanova University via Global Sisters Report)

A: I joined the Sisters of Mercy because they were one of the seven communities of sisters teaching at West Catholic High School (in Philadelphia) where I went to high school. I found them very hospitable, friendly, happy, and I was drawn to their charism. But I've also been asked why I didn't join the Oblate Sisters of Providence like my aunts did. I did not feel that that was for me. I feel that there's much more that I've been able to do, being where I am.

Q: Can you recall any childhood memories that impacted your faith and spirituality? Did your family have any favorite prayers, songs or rituals?

A: I was an only child, and from third to eighth grade, I went to an elementary school in West Philadelphia in an area called the "Black Bottom." It was the real bottom of West Philly, and it was a predominantly Black community. It wasn't seen as one of the best neighborhoods in the area. When I went to school, I would be by myself. I walked eight blocks or more to school each day.

I had great devotion to Martin de Porres, and at the time he was "Blessed." He was the only Black saint that we had. So, for me, that's showing some of the racism in the Church because the other saints that were canonized in the last 10 years or so only died like 20 years ago. Martin died in 1639, and he wasn't canonized until 1962.

Martin was very close to me. I would pray and talk to him while walking to school. My school was predominantly white Irish with over 2,000 students. Probably only about 14 of us were African American, so I needed some connection to my own identity.

Catholicism has always been a part of me, and I tell people that I really would never have been able

to be in and stay and live the life that I have if it wasn't for my faith. Even in grade school, going to school, the presence of prayer, faith and God were there.

One of the most important prayers for me and my mother was the rosary. Part of that is I have great devotion to Our Lady because that's who I'm named after. My name means "heart of Mary." People think that name was given to me in religious life, but I was baptized with that name.

Q: I'm from New Orleans, where we've had our fair share of racism and discrimination, especially in the Catholic Church. My grandmother told me stories of how she had to sit in the very back of the church behind the whites, and because of that, they would sometimes run out of the Eucharist, and at other times she was even denied the host. Did you have any similar experiences or encounters of church-related discrimination?

A: I did during Communion at the altar rail when I was in the third grade. When it was time for Communion at the school Mass, we got in line and stood up on the altar step because we were small, right? The priests denied me Communion, and I always remember that day. The other girls in my class were all the same height, so for me not to get it, it had to be because I was Black.

Then at the age of 13 or 14, my family and I were at a predominantly white church in Maryland, where my father's family had property. At that time, the last three pews were reserved for Blacks, and the rest of the church was white. Everybody was seated in the church waiting for Mass to begin, and a white couple came in with a child. There were no seats in the front, so we had to get out of our seats and give them the seats.

Q: What does Black Catholi-

cism mean to you?

A: It means that I must, first, acknowledge that my culture, self-expression and identity are different than maybe a white person. Every person of color, or every African American, is not the same as me. I'm a Black Catholic. I must look at what I've come from, what I've experienced, and the impact that it has on me. I encountered racism, but it doesn't mean that it has to destroy me. Instances like that helped change me, and they helped me to look at things a little bit different.

One word that I've been saying a lot is intentionality. I feel that we need to be intentional and very specific about what we're doing and why we're doing it. We need to do our homework because what I'm finding sometimes in situations, people will be out there marching, and they don't even know why they're marching.

The other thing for the Church I have found in the past is that a lot of times, people always depended on the bishops, priests or those in leadership to speak out about something that's wrong or unjust. For me, the Church is the people of God, so me and the pew are just as responsible and accountable as the top leader might be for what happens in our Church.

Q: Black Catholics have struggled over their identity and their place/role in the Church battling this question: How can we truly be our authentic selves and be Catholic? How can the Catholic Church further support the Black Catholic community? What action steps would you like to see?

A: There are too many African Americans who do not have a sense of worth and are not encouraged. What I want to see is more accountability and responsibility from leaders who are supposed to be educated.

I also want our bishops and Church leaders to empower the people that are in the Church. I want people to be willing to be vulnerable and admit that some of us make mistakes. As a person of color, I need to have that sense of empowerment and real support.

I love the Roman Catholic Church, and I'm going to stay in it, but I'm also going to complain when it's not doing what I feel that God is calling us to do.

Q: What is the greatest lesson that your Catholic faith has taught you?

A: I think the greatest thing I've learned is the love that God has for people. I'm a person that likes interacting and connecting with people. Our faith is built on love, so I think my faith has taught me to love everyone, really look at our God, look at Jesus and to see how much love I can give to others.

The only person you can really change is yourself. You can help and lead people to change, but the actual change can only come from within.

Why the Church lifted its ban on cremation



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
FATHER KENNETH DOYLE
CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

Q. My mother and I have been discussing how some of the rules in the Catholic Church have changed. One example is cremation. Why is it OK now, but it wasn't some years ago? Who gets to make the rules, and how do we know that they are truly acceptable to God? (Wichita, Kansas)

A. In 1963, the Catholic Church changed its policy and lifted the ban on cremation. Among the reasons were sanitation risks, overcrowded cemeteries and financial considerations (i.e., the expense of traditional burials). At the same time, though, the Church has continued to express a strong preference for the burial or entombment of the deceased, preferably in a Catholic cemetery.

A Vatican instruction from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued in 2016 underlines the theological thinking behind the change. It explains that "cremation of the deceased's body does not affect his or her soul, nor does it prevent God, in his omnipotence, from raising up the deceased's body to new life."

However, that same instruction explains that "in memory of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord, the mystery that illumines the Christian meaning of death, burial

is above all the most fitting way to express faith and hope in the resurrection of the body."

Cremation is now permitted for Catholics, so long as it is not chosen in denial of the Christian teaching on resurrection and the sacredness of the human body.

The Church's teaching also notes that the following are not considered to be reverent dispositions of the remains: scattering them, dividing cremated remains, e.g., among family members, or keeping them in the home.

As for your final questions, the Vatican makes the rules; as to their acceptability to God, the Church decides after prayer and reflection — as it has done here — based on its teachings and on what seems reasonable under specific circumstances.

Q. If someone has left the Catholic Church for a different denomination and is no longer a practicing Catholic, should they be allowed to receive Communion in the Catholic Church?

Recently my wife and I were helping a priest to prepare her father's funeral, and I asked the priest whether someone who is no longer a practicing Catholic would be allowed to receive Communion at the funeral. He said that they should not receive but that he was not going to monitor the situation.

At the funeral Mass, this same priest announced that non-Catholics

and Catholics who were not prepared should not receive. But in fact, some of those very people did come forward to take Communion.

What should be the consequences for these people, after they heard it announced that they should not receive? And should a priest who knows that someone is not eligible to receive deny that person Communion when he comes forward? (Dinwiddie)

A. On the general rule, you are right: Those who are not Catholics should not take Communion at a Catholic Mass.

There are certain exceptions: Orthodox Christians, for example, are welcome to receive; a Protestant spouse marrying a Catholic may be given permission to receive Communion at the wedding Mass. In any of those circumstances, the non-Catholic must share our faith in the meaning of the Eucharist, and he or she must lack normal access to a minister of their own faith tradition.

As to what the consequences are when someone who is ineligible takes Communion, I don't know the answer to that; I would prefer leaving it to God to sort that out. And as for a priest denying Communion at the altar rail, I have never done that, nor am I likely to. I just don't know everyone's circumstances, and the worst thing would be to be wrong in making that judgment.

Q. One thing in the Gospels about which I've always been curious

is why, after casting out a demon or performing some other miracle, Jesus would often command that witnesses "tell no one." Wouldn't a wider knowledge of these miracles have helped his ministry? (Indiana)

A. You are correct in observing that often Jesus would ask observers to keep his miracles secret. Examples abound. In Matthew's Gospel we are told that many people followed Christ and he "cured them all" but "warned them not to make him known" (12:15).

In Mark, we learn that "he had cured many and, as a result, those who had diseases were pressing upon him to touch him" but that "he warned them sternly not to make him known" (3:10, 12); and in Luke, we read that, after he had raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead, "her parents were astounded, and he instructed them to tell no one what had happened" (8:56).

The fundamental reason for Jesus' reluctance to spread news of his miracles was this: Jesus did not want people to be distracted from what he really came to do — namely, the ministry of the word.

In Mark, Jesus had told his disciples, "Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come" (1:38). His concern was that the crowds would be dazzled by the miracles rather than give their attention to the lessons he had come to teach.

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

Lenten Mission 2022

March 15 - 18, 2022
6:30 - 8:00 PM
St. Pius X Norfolk

**CHANGE
OUR
HEARTS...**

...THROUGH GRATITUDE AND PRAISE

...THROUGH FORGIVENESS

...THROUGH ADVERSITY

...THROUGH FELLOWSHIP AND SACRIFICE

MARCH 15
GRATITUDE & PRAISE



STEVE BRANNING
Director of Christian
Formation & Evangelization
St. Nicholas Catholic
Church, Va Beach

MARCH 16
FORGIVENESS



FR. MICHAEL RENNINGER
Pastor
St. Mary's Richmond

MARCH 17
ADVERSITY



ALISON DELANEY
Board Certified
Catholic Chaplain
VCU

MARCH 18*
FELLOWSHIP AND SACRIFICE



Stations of the Cross followed
by a Lenten Soup Supper with
the parish community
*Begins at 6:00 PM

All are welcome to attend for free. Registration is not required.

Find out more at: spxnorfolk.org/lentenmission2022



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For a purer heart, make the most of Lent's 40 days



IN LIGHT OF FAITH
BARBARA HUGHES

I've never been a numbers person. Unlike my husband who can add, subtract, multiply, divide and figure percentages in his head within seconds, I reach for a pen or calculator whenever I face a math problem that involves more than single digits. However, as I was preparing talks for several Lenten retreats, I was intrigued with the biblical significance of the number 40.

According to Scripture, Jesus spent 40 days in the desert where he was tempted while praying and fasting. This is the reason the Church observes Lent for 40 days, but that's just one event.

During the great flood, God sent rain for 40 days and 40 nights. The Israelites spent 40 years wandering in the desert, and the reigns of Saul, David and Solomon each lasted for 40 years. Yet, these examples represent only a microcosm of the times the number 40 appears in Scripture.

A Google search revealed that 40 appears 159 times in Scripture, which points to the obvious. The use of 40 is symbolic rather than factual.

Its significance is about more than representing a lengthy period of time. Some Scripture scholars suggest that in the Hebrew Scriptures, 40 represented the age and condition of the world, its four corners signifying the brokenness, finite, incomplete and toilsome nature of life on earth. This interpretation invites us to examine what took place in the hearts and lives of the people to whom Scripture assigns the number 40.

Imagine the close quarters, fear and uncertainty that Noah and his family endured while sharing their home with animals of every species as the heavens poured rain. Yet, when they emerged, they were given the opportunity of a new beginning. A daunting task to be sure, but having witnessed the power of God, they learned to trust the Lord.

When the Israelites spent 40 days wandering around the Sinai Desert, they learned to depend on God for food, water and safety. Having been given the Ten Commandments, they were taught the ways of God. It was a period of hardship during which they learned the importance of obedience to God.

The most powerful kings of Israel, Saul, David and Solomon reigned for 40 years. Though they were great

rulers, each sinned and learned the hard way that whenever they sinned, personal strife followed.

When we consider 40 in regard to the experience of these biblical figures, it's not surprising that the evangelists placed Jesus in the desert for 40 days. Not only was the desert a place where the chosen people experience hardship and temptation, it was the place where they learned to trust that God would provide for their spiritual and physical well-being.

In Jesus we have a perfect example of how we are to respond to the temptations that beset every person during life. Jesus refuted the devil by quoting the Word of God. It's a lesson that we can take to heart and emulate as a way to remain faithful. Life is difficult and the desert is an apt symbol for the time we spend on earth.

I remember the first time I visited the desert. It was during a Catholic writers' retreat that was held at a Redemptorist retreat house in the Senora Desert in Arizona. As I checked into my room, I noticed there were several bottles of water on the desk, and next to them was a placard with instructions for entering the desert, written in bold print. They were:

■ Never enter the desert alone.

■ Always take water with you.
■ Carry a map and/or a compass.
■ Beware of snakes, scorpions and other deadly creatures.

It seems to me that the same warnings could be applied to the spiritual journey.

Jesus gave us the Church so that we never have to travel alone. We have the sacraments that provide living water, food and healing for the journey, while Scripture acts as a reliable guide.

Similarly, as we travel through life, we need to be aware of occasions of sin that threaten our spiritual well-being. Just as ancient desert travelers went out of their way to find watering holes, so should we seek out those places that refresh us during difficult times.

Obviously, we don't spend our entire life in a spiritual desert, but then neither did Jesus. Lent lasts for only 40 days. It's important to make the most of this time so that when we emerge, we will do so with a purer heart than when we began the journey.

May this Lent be a time of learning and living out the ways of God.

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

Remember, enter into promises fulfilled by God



**BELIEVE AS
YOU PRAY**
MSGR. TIMOTHY KEENEY

One of those biblical words that people hear, but that they don't necessarily get in their bones, is covenant. Because we live in a world where our lives are sometimes ruled by contractual obligations, we hear the word covenant and substitute in our minds the word contract or even diminish it to be only a clause in a contract.

Contracts are important; we even have a phrase in our law that talks about the sanctity of a contracts. But covenants are at a whole other level.

In the 1988 vice-presidential debate, Sen. Lloyd Bentsen responded this way when Sen. Dan Quayle compared himself to a young Sen. John Kennedy:

"Senator, I served with Jack Kennedy. I knew Jack Kennedy. Jack Kennedy was a friend of mine. Senator, you're no Jack Kennedy."

So, to paraphrase Senator Bentsen: "Contract, I know what a covenant is. Covenants are friends of mine. You, contract, are no covenant."

Generally, you can say that contracts deal with goods and services, while covenants deal with relationships between people. Or, at a

deeper level, contracts deal with rights and duties, whereas covenants establish permanent relationships of blood.

During Lent, the Old Testament readings present the great covenants of salvation history between God and his people. The five great covenants of the Old Testament are the Noahtic Covenant, the Abrahamic Covenants (presented in our readings today), the Mosaic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, and the New Covenant announced by Jeremiah. All these covenants would ultimately be fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

In the time of Abraham, the promise of descendants was really a promise that your memory would continue forever. Although that promise was provisionally fulfilled through Isaac and his descendants, it is ultimately fulfilled in those who have been grafted onto the family tree of God's people through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the waters of baptism into the Paschal Mystery.

During this Lenten pilgrimage, in a special way, we are being asked to journey with our catechumens and candidates who will be received into the Church this Easter and added to the Body of Christ.

The covenant of land assured Abraham and his descendants that they would continue to be God's chosen people. That connection with the land and God's election was so strong that if for any reason a family had to sell their ancestral land because of poverty, in a jubilee year that

property would be restored to that family. To revoke the covenant of land was to revoke God's election, which was impossible.

Again, although this promise was provisionally fulfilled by the Jewish people's entry into the promised land, it is fulfilled in the promise of heaven with Christ, which is our true spiritual home.

The depth of God's covenant love is shown in the strange prophetic action that takes place in today's reading. The rite being performed is the same one done by a father adopting a child as his own.

The Jewish people understood that life belonged to God, and they also believed that the essence of life was located in blood. If a new kind of intimate relationship was going to be brought into existence, it could only happen through releasing blood as a sacrifice. The adopting father then walked between the two halves of the sacrifice signifying that if he ever failed in this new relationship, he put himself under a curse of death, of being split in two.

It is now God who puts himself under this curse for our sake, so that we can enter a new kind of relationship with him through the gift of descendants and land. Image that — a God willing to put himself under the curse of death in order to establish a new kind of relationship with us.

We don't have to image because that is exactly what we celebrate each Lent and Easter. This Lent is a time to remember and enter into the promises made and fulfilled in God.

Msgr. Timothy Keeney is pastor of Incarnation, Charlottesville.

Second Sunday of Lent – Year C

Gen 15: 5-12, 17-18;

Ps 27: 1, 7-8, 8-9, 13-14;

Phil 3: 17-4:1 or 3:20-4:1;

Lk 9: 28b-36

WHAT WE'VE HEARD

Life-saving number: Hope4Life reports that it has surpassed 900 “saves” of unborn children as a result of their weekly presence in front of the Virginia Beach Planned Parenthood clinic. Their pro-life witness dates to 2015.

Good people doing good things I: The social ministry committee at St. Jude and Immaculate Conception Parishes in Louisa County recently contributed a \$5,000 Rice Bowl grant award to the Louisa County Resource Council. The money will be used to help fund the Children’s Emergency Feeding Program.

Good people doing good things II: The O. Ralph Puccinelli Foundation (ORP) has announced the establishment of a \$5,000 scholarship at Benedictine College Prep. The scholarship is in memory of Ralph Puccinelli and will be given to an incoming Benedictine freshman starting this fall. More information about the foundation is available at www.orpuccinellifoundation.com.

Award-winning brothers: Jim Wentzel, a senior at Benedictine College Prep, took first place in the Voice of Democracy contest sponsored by the Veterans of Foreign Wars — VFW Post 8040. His recorded essay was on “America, where do we go from here?” His brother, Joseph, an eighth grader at St. Mary School, Richmond, won the Patriots’ Pen essay contest at the same post writing on “How Can I Be a Good American?”

Design for the Vatican: The Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization is seeking a logo design for the Holy Year 2025 jubilee celebration. Deadline for submitting entries is Friday, May 20. Complete information about this international competition is available at www.iubilaeum2025.va/en/logo.html.

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

SCRIPTURE SEARCH®

Gospel for March 13, 2022
Luke 9:28b-36

Following is a word search based on the Gospel reading for the Second Sunday in Lent, Cycle C: Transfiguration. The words can be found in all directions in the puzzle.

EIGHT DAYS	HE TOOK	MOUNTAIN
PRAYING	DAZZLING	BEHOLD
MOSES	ELIJAH	APPEARED
IN GLORY	JERUSALEM	PETER
SLEEP	MASTER	LET US
THREE	A CLOUD	ENTERED
LISTEN	ALONE	HAD SEEN

APPEARANCE

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

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Russian Catholics grieving after Ukraine invasion

Church spokesman sees 'anger, bewilderment' among faithful

JONATHAN LUXMOORE
Catholic News Service

WARSAW, Poland — Catholics in Russia have been left “grieving, angered and bewildered” by their country’s invasion of Ukraine, according to the Church’s spokesman, who also warned that citizens would face harsh economic consequences from the conflict.

Father Kirill Gorbunov, spokesman for the Russian bishops’ conference, said many Catholics are angry “and don’t know where to direct this anger — some are turning it on God, on the Church, on the Russian government and on the world.”

“While some Catholics are reacting as if none of this affects them, some discussion groups formed as part of the Church’s synodal process have now come together for mutual support in the current state of grief, anger and bewilderment,” said Father Gorbunov, who is also vicar general of the Moscow-based Mother of God Archdiocese.

“It’s obvious this situation will have very, very severe consequences for the well-being of citizens here. Our most important task as priests is to remind people of the Church’s teaching on war and peace. But we must also be very attentive to the most vulnerable — the elderly, sick and poor — and act as counselors, helping people react in a meaningful, prayerful way which leads to integrity rather than madness.”

Detachments from Russia’s invasion force, amassed in border regions since last fall, attacked



A woman holds a sign that reads “We are against war” during a protest against the Russian invasion of Ukraine, in Moscow, Feb. 27, 2022. (CNS photo/Evgenia Novozhenina, Reuters)

Ukraine in the early hours of Feb. 24, triggering harsh resistance from Ukraine’s 200,000-strong armed forces and a huge refugee exodus, as well as sharp fall in Russian currency, the ruble. On March 1, Russian troops continued to pound Kharkiv, Ukraine’s second-largest city, and a 40-mile column of Russian tanks and vehicles was reported to be within 20 miles of Kyiv.

In a Feb. 24 pastoral message, Russia’s five-member bishops’ conference said it was “deeply shocked” that war had erupted “despite huge efforts at reconcil-

iation,” and the bishops backed the pope’s appeal for March 2, Ash Wednesday, to be marked by “intense prayer and fasting for the sake of saving human lives.”

They also asked priests to celebrate Masses “for the preservation of peace and justice” and called on fellow Christians “to resist lies and hatred, and be a source of reconciliation.”

“This confrontation brings death and destruction and threatens the security of the entire world,” the bishops said.

“The peoples of our countries are united not only by a common

history, but also by a great common suffering that befell us in the past because of the madness of war. ... Let our contemporaries know they will have to give a strict account for the military actions they have taken. The course of coming centuries largely depends on their current decisions.”

As the war progressed, Russian Catholic churches held peace prayer vigils. The Saratov-based St. Clement Diocese began a nine-day adoration of the Blessed Sacrament March 1.

Moscow Archbishop Paolo Pezzi, president of the bishops’ conference, circulated a “prayer for peace and fatherland,” to be read at Masses. It calls for Catholics to “be able to see a common future,” while also shunning “lies that destroy the world.”

Father Gorbunov told CNS Russia’s bishops had based their message on the Church’s dogmatic constitution, “Lumen Gentium,” and were “expressing Church teaching, not just their own opinion.”

“We’ll see if they wish to expand on this in coming days, but I personally think things are changed not by statements, but by the change of heart people experience during prayer, thinking and talking,” he said. “In normal everyday life, people don’t always understand what’s going on. But when they start to pray, they understand the terror, find compassion and see the necessity of doing something.”

“Like many ordinary people, I’m no expert in predictions — the decision-makers will get what they deserve, and I hope it won’t be the worst-case scenario for either Ukraine or our country,” he said.

Pope’s Ash Wednesday homily emphasizes ‘weapons of spirit’

CAROL GLATZ
Catholic News Service

ROME — Prayer, charity and fasting have a medicinal power to purify oneself, help others and change history, Pope Francis wrote in a homily read by Cardinal Pietro Parolin.

Prayer, charity and fasting “are weapons of the spirit and, with them, on this day of prayer and fasting for Ukraine, we implore from God that peace which men and women are incapable of building by themselves,” the pope wrote.

Italian Cardinal Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, presided over the March 2 Ash Wednesday Mass instead of Pope Francis, who had been prescribed rest for severe knee pain by his doctors. The 85-year-old pope had led the weekly general audience earlier in the day.

Before the Mass, Cardinal Parolin, other cardinals, bishops, religious and lay faithful walked from the Benedictine monastery of St. Anselm to the Dominican-run Basilica of Santa Sabina on Rome’s Aventine Hill. At the basilica, Cardinal Parolin received ashes on the top of his head from Cardinal Jozef Tomko, titular cardinal of the basilica, and distributed ashes to a number of cardinals, Benedictines, Domini-

cans and others attending the Mass.

The rite of receiving ashes helps people reflect on “the transience of our human condition,” the pope wrote in his homily. “It is like a medicine that has a bitter taste and yet is effective for curing the illness of appearances, a spiritual illness that enslaves us and makes us dependent on the admiration of others.”

“Those who seek worldly rewards never find peace or contribute to peace. They lose sight of the Father and their brothers and sisters,” he wrote. “Let us make a diagnosis of the appearances that we seek, and let us try to unmask them. It will do us good.”

Lent is also a journey of healing, he wrote, that requires living each day with “a renewed spirit, a different ‘style’” that is aided by prayer, charity and fasting, he wrote.

“Purified by the Lenten ashes, purified of the hypocrisy of appearances,” prayer, charity and fasting “become even more powerful and restore us to a living relationship with God, our brothers and sisters, and ourselves,” he wrote.

“Lenten charity, purified by these ashes, brings us back to what is essential, to the deep joy to be found in giving,” without pride and

ostentation, but hidden and “far from the spotlights,” wrote the pope.

And, he wrote, fasting is not a diet for the body, but a way to keep the spirit healthy, freeing people from being self-centered.

Fasting should also not be restricted to food alone, he wrote. “Especially during Lent, we should fast from anything that can create in us any kind of addiction,” so that fasting will have an actual impact on one’s life.

“Prayer, charity and fasting are not medicines meant only for ourselves but for everyone: Because they can change history,” because those who experience their effects “almost unconsciously pass them on to others” and because these are “the principal ways for God to intervene in our lives and in the world,” he wrote.

In his written homily, the pope asked people to stop being in a rush and to find the time to stand in silence before God.

“Let us rediscover the fruitfulness and simplicity of a heartfelt dialogue with the Lord. For God is not interested in appearances. Instead, he loves to be found in secret, ‘the secrecy of love,’ far from all ostentation and clamor.”

Bishops praise rejection of ‘extreme’ abortion bill

JULIE ASHER
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The failure of the U.S. Senate Feb. 28 to advance an “extreme measure” to establish a legal right to abortion at any stage of pregnancy nationwide “is a tremendous relief,” said the chairmen of the U.S. bishops’ pro-life and religious freedom committees.

“We must respect and support mothers, their unborn children and the consciences of all Americans,” the committee chairmen said in a joint statement, noting a provision in the bill likely would not have protected the conscience rights of health care providers who object to abortion.

Passing the Women’s Health Protection Act, also known as H.R. 3755, “would have led to the loss of millions of unborn lives and left countless women to suffer from the physical and emotional trauma of abortion,” said Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Pro-Life Activities, and Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York, chairman of the USCCB’s Committee for Religious Liberty.

In a 46-48 vote, the Senate failed to approve a procedure known as cloture — which limits debate and ends a filibuster in order to move to a vote on a bill. Sixty votes were needed for cloture.

In addition to codifying Roe v. Wade, the 1973 Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion nationwide, the bill would have eliminated pro-life laws at every level of government — including parental notification for minor girls, informed consent, and health or safety protections specific to abortion facilities.

“H.R. 3755 also would have compelled all Americans to support abortions here and abroad with their tax dollars,” a USCCB news release said. “(It) would have also likely forced health care providers and professionals to perform, assist in, and/or refer for abortion against their deeply held beliefs, as well as forced employers and insurers to cover or pay for abortion.”

“Rather than providing comprehensive material and social support for a challenging pregnancy, H.R. 3755 fails women and young girls in need by instead offering a free abortion as the ‘solution’ to their difficulty,” Archbishop Lori and Cardinal Dolan said in their statement.

“Women deserve better than this. We implore Congress to promote policies that recognize the value and human dignity of both mother and child,” they said.

The U.S. House passed H.R. 3755 in a 218-211 vote Sept. 24.

Supporters of the bill want to codify Roe in the likelihood the U.S. Supreme Court will overturn the near-

ly 50-year-old decision when it hands down its ruling in Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, a case involving Mississippi’s ban on most abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy. The decision is expected in June or July.

If Roe is overturned, the court decision will leave abortion laws to the states.

After the House vote, U.S. Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., called on the Senate to Pass the Women’s Health Protection Act., saying that the Mississippi case “is a product of Republican attacks on reproductive rights spanning decades.”

If Roe is overturned, the court will be “depriving individuals across the country of their right to choose to have an abortion,” said DeLauro, a Catholic.

In a Feb. 23 letter to every U.S. senator, Archbishop Lori and Cardinal Dolan urged them to vote against this “radical bill” to legislatively enshrine “the killing of defenseless, voiceless human beings.”

“As Pope Francis stated regarding unborn children, ‘Their killing in huge numbers, with the endorsement of states, is a serious problem that undermines the foundations of the construction of justice, compromising the proper solution of any other human and social issue,’” they wrote.

“This bill insists that elective abortion, including late-term elective abortion, is a ‘human right’ and

‘women’s health care’ — something that should be promoted, funded and celebrated” when it fact, they continued, “abortion is the opposite of women’s health care, and is an extreme violation of human rights. It has no clear justification in terms of women’s health.”

Archbishop Lori and Cardinal Dolan emphasized that the Catholic Church, “through its numerous institutions and programs,” consistently affirms and supports every human life “regardless of its condition or stage of development.”

“This is why the Church supports a robust social safety net for persons who are poor or otherwise experiencing hardship, supports the dignity and rights of migrants, and opposes the death penalty,” they said.

“And this is the reason why the Church supports, helps staff and fund pregnancy-help centers and ministries,” the prelates added.

This also is why, they said, the U.S. bishops launched “Walking with Moms in Need,” a nationwide initiative “to engage every Catholic parish in providing a safety net to ensure that pregnant and parenting moms have the resources, love and support they need to nurture the lives of their children.”

Editor’s note: The text of the letter from Archbishop Lori and Cardinal Dolan can be found at <https://bit.ly/3tnQBG8>.

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Why Pope Francis has not criticized Russia publicly

CINDY WOODEN
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Condemning violence and expressing his concern for and solidarity with Ukraine, Pope Francis has not uttered the word “Russia” publicly.

While Russian President Vladimir Putin has become a pariah in the West, Pope Francis has continued the long Vatican tradition of not condemning one side in a war, even when it is blatantly evident who the aggressor is.

A Vatican diplomat told Catholic News Service March 1 that the pope must keep a door or window open for dialogue, even if it was a long shot.

“Silence the weapons,” the pope said Feb. 27.

While he repeatedly voiced his concern for Ukraine and Ukrainians in that post-Angelus appeal, he did not name Russia.

But it would be difficult not to understand which leader he was talking about when he said, “One who wages war forgets humanity” and the real lives of the people who will suffer. Instead, he said, one who wages war “puts partisan interests and power before everything. He relies on the diabolical and perverse logic of weapons, which is the furthest thing from God’s will, and distances himself from the ordinary people who want peace” and are the real victims of every conflict.

Pope Francis’ top diplomat, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican secretary of state, was less diplomatic the next day in an interview with four

Italian newspapers even as he offered the Vatican’s service to facilitate negotiations with Russia.

“Although what we feared and hoped would not happen has happened — the war unleashed by Russia against Ukraine — I am convinced that there is always room for negotiation,” the cardinal had said.

Some “ecumenical” motivation for the pope not mentioning Russia by name also must be acknowledged, a Vatican official said March 1, but one cannot go so far as to claim the pope is putting the sensitivities of the Russian Orthodox before the lives of Ukrainians and the autonomy of their nation.

And in fact, the official said, the pope does not want to step into the tensions already existing among Orthodox in the region, even if there is hope that eventually he could have some influence with Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, who is seen as a close ally of Putin.

In January 2019, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople signed a decree recognizing an independent church in Ukraine despite strong criticism from the Russian Orthodox Church, which sees Ukraine as part of its church territory. Patriarch Kirill, in protest, excommunicated Patriarch Bartholomew and severed communion with him and his followers.

The recognition left two Orthodox communities in Ukraine: The newly recognized Orthodox Church of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Ortho-

dox Church still tied to the Moscow Patriarchate.

When the fighting began in late February, the independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine obviously stood with its people in condemning the Russian invasion, but the Ukrainian church aligned with Moscow also spoke of the situation as “tragic” and offered its prayers especially for the Ukrainian soldiers “who stand guard and protect and defend our land and our people.”

After the invasion Feb. 24, Patriarch Kirill issued a statement saying, “I take the suffering of people caused by the events taking place with deep and heartfelt pain.”

“As the patriarch of all Russia and the primate of a church whose flock is located in Russia, Ukraine and other countries, I deeply empathize with everyone affected by this tragedy,” he continued. “I call on all parties to the conflict to do everything possible to avoid civilian casualties.”

How to help Ukraine

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Various Catholic agencies are collecting donations to aid with the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, as people flee to escape Russian bombing and shelling. Here are some places to donate. This list is not exhaustive.

The international Caritas confederation is collecting funds to help Caritas Ukraine. In the United States, that is through Catholic Relief Services: <https://bit.ly/3LWtOKa>. Internationally, you can donate through <https://www.caritas.org/>.

The Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia also has a link: <https://ukrarcheparchy.us/donate>.

Two pontifical agencies also are taking donations for Ukraine: Catholic Near East Welfare Association, <https://cnewa.org/campaigns/ukraine/>, and Aid to the Church in Need, <https://www.churchinneed.org/>. Internationally, Aid to the

Church can be reached at <https://bit.ly/3vfvCn4>.

The Knights of Columbus launched the Ukraine Solidarity Fund, and donations can be made at kofc.org/secure/en/donate/ukraine.html. On Feb. 25, the Knights of Columbus announced a commitment of \$1 million for immediate distribution to support Ukrainian refugees and will match all funds raised up to an additional \$500,000. The relief funding will be used to provide shelter, food, medical supplies, clothing and religious goods, as well as other humanitarian needs as identified, both directly in Ukraine and through refugee sites in Poland.

Donations can also be made to Jesuit Refugee Service at www.jrsusa.org to support the agency’s work in Europe “to accompany, serve, and advocate for those forced to flee from war and conflict.”

Pope

Continued from Page 1

Pope Francis, Sister Smerilli said, “just asks to listen to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. These cries have been neglected for so long, and yet every day we see what happens to the earth and what happens to the poorest and most vulnerable and what this affects us all.”

She added, “It’s through listening, acknowledging suffering but also opportunities and potential for change that we can find hope. In having hope, recognizing in each other, is what will motivate us to take the first step towards integral and collaborative actions. So in a word, he is teaching us how to listen and we are trying to do this.”

‘Service to the wounded’

Stephen Wright, director of the Catholic Project at The Catholic University of America in Washington, said the pope wants the faithful to proclaim Christ in all they do.

“We can build up the Church. But he said we can walk as much as we want, we can build many things, but if we don’t proclaim Christ, then we are proclaiming a demonic worldliness,” he said.

“It was that stark,” Wright added. “All of our listening, all of our accompaniment leads to proclaiming the truth about Jesus Christ who saves us and saves the world.”

Kim Daniels, co-director of the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life, spoke of how the 2023 synod on synodality fits in with Pope Francis’ penchant for listening.

“Here you have the world’s oldest institution widely seen as stuck in the past, beset with problems,” she said, “and it’s embarking on something new and unprecedented, this global listening process open to everyone with the goal of living out our mission set most of all on humble service to whom Pope Francis calls those lying wounded on the roadside.”

“This is a call to each of us, especially laypeople,” she said. “It’s calling us to greater participation and for the purpose of living out our mission of loving God and our members.”

Daniels added, “Right now listening sessions are going on in parishes, social service ministries, universities, other Catholic groups around the world,” but for Catholics who don’t feel connected to these institutions, “there are other ways to get your input front and center in

this listening process.”

“A lot of the input and results are just bringing people from different backgrounds together,” she said, “listening to each other, building trust and community and friendship, praying together all of this to the good.”

‘Focus on what brings us together’

Sister Norma Pimentel, a member of the Missionaries of Jesus, who is executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley in the Diocese of Brownsville, Texas, said Pope Francis is “definitely that presence that helps us to recognize that we must let go of everything that stops us from reaching out and being present to the other.”

She made a case in point: “I just hear over and over from so many people texting and saying, what are we doing about what’s happening in Ukraine? But what happens in Ukraine is also happening here at our border. It has been happening here on the border with the U.S. and Mexico, with so many families coming daily to just ask for help, for safety.”

John Carr, the moderator of the forum and the Georgetown initiative’s other co-director, said, “I was reminded by one of my friends from Louisiana that this is Mardi Gras

today, but it doesn’t feel like Mardi Gras. It feels like Ash Wednesday, a long, long Ash Wednesday.”

But Carr still has his memories of March 13, 2013, when Pope Francis made his first appearance as pope.

“I’ll never forget he asked us to pray for him before he blessed us. And we saw his simple ways, where he lived, what he wore, who he spent his time with, the car he rode in,” Carr said.

And even though doctors sidelined the pope from participating in Ash Wednesday services this year due to ongoing knee problems, Carr said, “he stood at that window on Sunday and said, ‘Those who wage war forget humanity. Put down your weapons. God is with the peacemakers.’”

Sister Pimentel said it does the Church’s members good to “focus on the things that bring us together.”

“I think that’s what Francis is doing, helping us to be one Church, one people, one world that is united, that cares for one another,” she said. “When we focus on that, we can look at the things that brings us together and be able to listen, like (Sister) Alessandra was saying. We must listen to each other so that we can walk together.”

OPPORTUNITIES

Church of the Ascension, Virginia Beach, is seeking a part-time (20 hours per week) communication specialist. This position will manage Ascension's communication avenues to ensure parish information is being disseminated on multiple platforms to staff, ministries, parishioners and our local community. This person will collaborate with the parish secretary, other staff and lay leaders to ensure information is being communicated consistently and correctly. Because evangelization is an important part of our messaging, the applicant must be a practicing Roman Catholic. Visit www.ascensionvb.org/employment-opportunity for additional information or email Lisa Liedl at liedll@ascensionvb.org.

The Catholic Diocese of Richmond seeks a highly-qualified, innovative and strategic leader for the position of associate superintendent for curriculum and instruction, Office of Catholic Schools. The associate superintendent implements the mission of the Office of Catholic Education in the areas of: curriculum, instruction, technology, professional development, Catholic identity, federal programs, supervision, administration, school accreditation and data-driven decision making. The associate superintendent will supervise the development of consensus curriculum and ensure the implementation at the school level. This position will also assist the superintendent with general oversight of regional school administrators and will oversee the development and implementation of school learning plans for continuous school improvement. The successful candidate must have a master's degree in education, curriculum and instruction, administration or equivalent; will have served as a Catholic school administrator in the role of principal or head of school (7+ years preferred); will demonstrate high-level skills in the areas of: communication, interpersonal relationships, organization and leadership; and must be a practicing Catholic in good standing. This position may require some evening and weekend hours and will require some occasional travel to schools within the diocese. Interested candidates should forward a cover letter, résumé and completed diocesan application <https://bit.ly/36ndEsX> to Kelly Shumate, HR coordinator, to jobs@richmonddiocese.org. Applications are due by Tuesday, March 15, 2022.

Catholic High School, a college preparatory school serving eastern Hampton Roads, is seeking a business manager to begin in June. A full-time, 12-month position, responsibilities include a wide variety

of administrative functions, including assurance of compliance with civil law, human resources and diocesan policies. The successful candidate has a bachelors' degree in business, accounting or a related field, demonstrated experience in establishing and maintaining budgets, three or more years in business administration and employee supervision. Interested candidates should send a cover letter, résumé, and diocesan application <https://bit.ly/36ndEsX> to Mrs. Peggy Boon, principal of Catholic High School at boonp@chsvb.org.

Peninsula Catholic High School has openings for the following positions:

Director of development and marketing. The director of development and marketing is charged with organizing, implementing and guiding a comprehensive philanthropy program to secure support, with a focus on major gifts and scholarship funding, through strategically cultivating constituency groups and the broader business community.

Director of enrollment. The director of enrollment provides visionary leadership in the development, implementation and achievement of strategic recruitment, retention and graduation goals of the school. The director is responsible for critical recruitment and marketing strategies, enrollment projections, goals, budgets, policies, procedures and guidance for the enrollment process. Visit www.peninsulacatholic.org for more information about both of these positions.

The Church of St. Thérèse, Chesapeake, is seeking a music coordinator. Excellent pianist skills required. Vocal abilities preferred. Position works closely with the pastor in choosing upbeat, contemporary Catholic music, coordinating parish musical needs and providing direction for choir, cantors and instrumentalists. Position is part-time (approximately 15-20 hours a week) plus availability for funerals and special liturgies if possible. Three to five years' experience is preferred. Salary is commensurate with diocesan guidelines. We anticipate the position will be available by mid-May or early June 2022. To apply, please submit a cover letter, résumé, diocesan application and references to Father Kevin J. O'Brien, Church of St. Thérèse, 4137 Portsmouth Blvd., Chesapeake, VA 23321-2127 or kobrien@sttheresechesva.org by April 14, 2022. If the position is not filled, we will extend the deadline. For diocesan application: <https://richmonddiocese.org/office/office-of-human-resources/>

SHORTAKES

40 Days Vigil is being held at Planned Parenthood, 201 N. Hamilton Street, Richmond, through Sunday, April 10. 40 Days for Life is an internationally coordinated 40-day campaign that aims to end abortion locally through prayer and fasting, community outreach and a peaceful all-day vigil in front of abortion businesses. Similar vigils are being held in Newport News, Roanoke and Charlottesville. For further information about a vigil in your area, go to <https://40daysforlife.com/browse-campaigns/>.

Scout Mass: All youth and adults involved with Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, American Heritage Girls or Trail Life in the Diocese of Richmond are invited to attend the annual Scout Mass where those who have earned religious medals and emblems throughout the past year will be honored. Bishop Barry C. Knestout will preside at the Mass on Sunday, March 13, 3 p.m., at St. Mary, Richmond. If you are interested in attending, contact the Office for Evangelization at: scouting@richmonddiocese.org.

All are invited to attend the "Living as Catholic Christians In Challenging Times" Lenten Mission with Dr. Ralph Martin at St. Stephen, Martyr, Chesapeake, Friday and Saturday, March 18 and 19. Cost of the mission is \$10/person; \$25/family; 12 and younger are free. To register (online only), please visit https://ssmrc.org/wp-content/uploads/Revised_Lenten_Mission_2_7-01.png.

Irish Night, Saturday, March 19. Join the Knights of Columbus Council #14129 for great Irish food, Irish entertainment and fun in St. Mary's Parish Hall, 9505 Gayton Road, Richmond. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. In-person event menu includes: shepherd's pie, corned beef/cabbage, beef stew, Irish soda bread, Irish bread pudding, Irish beer, wine and alternative beverages available. Irish entertainment and activities include the Muggivan School of Dance, Irish music and songs performed by Fr. Mike and Deacon Peter and a 50/50 raffle. Proceeds support Virginia Knights of Columbus Charities, Inc. (KOVAR – kovarva.org). Tickets are \$20 each for adult to attend and enjoy the in-person event. Food to-go can be purchased and picked up on March 19, 10 a.m.— 2 p.m. Purchase tickets for the in-person event and for the food to-go via St. Mary's website at <https://www.stmarysrichmond.org>.

St. Paul Catholic Church, Richmond, will dedicate a statue of St. Joseph and the Child Jesus follow-

ing the 4:30 p.m. Mass, Saturday, March 19, the Feast of St. Joseph. All are invited to attend. The statue will have a plaque at its base that reads: "St. Joseph's Catholic Church, established in 1885, and located in Richmond's Jackson Ward, was the first church built to serve the City's Black Catholic Community. Upon its closure in 1969, many St. Joseph's parishioners became members of St. Paul's. This statue is erected to honor their dedication to their faith and their perseverance and courage in the face of racial inequity." Partial funding for this endeavor was provided by the Daniel Rudd Foundation.

Sarah Hart will be presenting a Lenten Mission on forgiveness using song, Scripture, storytelling and prayer at the Church of St. Therese, 4137 Portsmouth Blvd., Chesapeake, Sunday, April 3, 4 p.m., and Monday, April 4, 7 p.m., and Monday, April 4, 10 a.m., at Portsmouth Catholic Regional School. This is a free event! Hart is one of the leading figures in contemporary Catholic music today. Her songs of faith, spirit of joy and love for teaching and leading workshops have touched the lives of thousands. She is a Grammy and Audie Awards nominee, and has won BMI, Mark and ALA Odyssey awards. Her music has been recorded by many artists including Amy Grant, Celtic Women, Matt Maher and The Newsboys. For more information, contact Renee Cunningham (757) 488-2553 or rcunningham@sttheresechesva.org.

You are invited to "The Rehearsal," a worship and praise fellowship to include all Christian denominations on the Peninsula. Musicians, singers, prayer warriors and poets are welcome. Bring instruments and voices of all kinds for worship, prayer and praise. Second Saturday of the month, 12:30-3 p.m., St. Olaf Catholic Church, 104 Norge Lane, Williamsburg. For information, call Les at 757-846-1124. Fourth Sunday of the month, 5-7 p.m., St. Clare of Assisi Retreat Center, 620 Buckroe Ave., Hampton. For information, call Sherry 757-814-1706.

Join Fathers John David Ramsey and Danny Cogut on a spiritual journey to the places of St. John Paul II, Prague and Vienna the week of Sept. 18-30. Total cost per person for airfare, lodging and meals is \$4,399 double occupancy. Reservations are due March 31, with a deposit of \$500 per person. Your choice of airport: Dulles or Charlotte. For detailed information and registration form, contact Larry Cogut at LCOGUT@gmail.com or call 703-635-9243.

El Papa en el Ángelus: Rezar por quien nos ha tratado mal para tranformar el mal en bien

Rezar por quien nos ha tratado mal, sin ceder al instinto y al odio, pidiendo a Dios la fuerza de amar, tal como nos lo enseña Jesús, que pone la otra mejilla para apagar el odio y la injusticia, y pide cuentas con gentileza del mal recibido. Fueron algunas de las enseñanzas del Papa Francisco a la hora del Ángelus dominical, al meditar sobre el Evangelio del día.

“Poner la otra mejilla no es el repliegue del perdedor, sino la acción de quien tiene una fuerza interior más grande”. En la alocución previa a la oración mariana del Ángelus, el Papa Francisco reflexionó, como cada domingo, sobre el Evangelio del día, que hoy muestra al Señor Jesús dar “algunas indicaciones fundamentales de vida” a sus discípulos.

El discípulo está llamado a no ceder al instinto y al odio

El Señor, explicó Francisco, se refiere “a las situaciones más difíciles, las que constituyen para nosotros el banco de pruebas, las que nos ponen frente a quien es nuestro enemigo y hostil, a quien busca siempre hacernos mal”. En estos casos, tal como enseña Jesús, el discípulo está llamado “a no ceder al instinto y al odio, sino a ir más allá, mucho más allá”.

Jesús dice: «Amad a vuestros enemigos, haced bien a los que os odien» (Lc 6,27). Y aún más concreto: «Al que te hiera en una mejilla, preséntale también la otra» (v. 29). El Señor parece pedir lo imposible. Y además ¿por qué amar a los enemigos? Si no se reacciona a los prepotentes, todo abuso tiene vía libre, y esto no es justo. ¿Pero es realmente así? ¿Realmente el Señor nos pide cosas imposibles e injustas?

Poner la otra mejilla no significa sufrir en silencio

El Santo Padre pidió considerar, en primer lugar, el “sentido de injusticia” que advertimos en el “poner la otra mejilla”, y a pensar en la pasión de Jesús que, en su injusto proceso delante del sumo



El Papa Francisco dirige el Ángelus desde la ventana de su estudio con vista a la Plaza de San Pedro en el Vaticano el 27 de febrero de 2022. (Foto del CNS / Los medios del Vaticano)

sacerdote, a un cierto punto recibe una bofetada por parte de uno de los guardias. ¿Y Él cómo se comporta? Dice al guardia: «Si he hablado mal, declara lo que está mal; pero si he hablado bien, ¿por qué me pegas?» (Jn 18,23). Pide cuentas del mal recibido. Poner la otra mejilla no significa sufrir en silencio, ceder a la injusticia. Jesús con su pregunta denuncia lo que es injusto. Pero lo hace sin ira ni violencia, es más, con gentileza.

Una fuerza interior más grande

El Maestro, “no quiere desencadenar una discusión, sino calmar el rencor”, explicó Francisco, que precisó: quiere “apagar juntos el odio y la injusticia, tratando de recuperar al hermano culpable”. Esto es poner la otra mejilla: la mansedumbre de Jesús es una respuesta más fuerte que el golpe que recibió. Poner la otra mejilla no es el repliegue del perdedor, sino la acción de quien tiene una fuerza interior más grande, que vence el mal con el bien, que abre una brecha en el corazón del enemigo, desenmascarando lo absurdo de su odio. No lo dicta el cálculo, sino el amor.

Cuando el Señor pide algo, quiere darlo

El amor “gratuito e inmerecido” que recibimos de Jesús “genera en el corazón un modo de hacer semejante al suyo, que rechaza toda venganza”, enseñó el Papa, que planteó a continuación la siguiente objeción: “¿es posible que una persona llegue a amar a los propios enemigos?” Si dependiera solo de nosotros, sería imposible. Pero recordemos que, cuando el Señor pide algo, quiere darlo. Cuando me dice que ame a los enemigos, quiere darme la capacidad de hacerlo.

Pedirle a Dios la fuerza de amar

Recordando la oración de San Agustín al Señor «da lo que mandas y manda lo que quieras» (Confesiones, X, 29.40), el Obispo de Roma planteó un interrogante: “¿Qué pedirle? ¿Qué está Dios feliz de darnos?” Y respondió: La fuerza de amar, que no es una cosa, sino que es el Espíritu Santo.

Esto porque “con el Espíritu de Jesús podemos responder al mal con el bien, podemos amar a quien nos hace mal”. Así hacen los cristianos. ¡Qué triste es cuando personas y pueblos orgullosos de ser cristianos ven a los otros como enemigos y piensan en hacer guerra!

Rezar por quien nos ha tratado mal

Antes de dirigir su oración a la Madre de Dios, el Santo Padre pidió pensar en una persona “que nos ha hecho mal”, y a preguntarnos si tratamos de vivir las invitaciones de Jesús. Quizá “hay rencor” dentro de nosotros, dijo. Entonces, “a este rencor”, indicó, “acerquemos la imagen de Jesús, manso, durante su proceso”, y luego “pidamos al Espíritu Santo que actúe en nuestro corazón”. Finalmente “recemos por esa persona”: Rezar por quien nos ha tratado mal (cfr Lc 6,28) es lo primero para transformar el mal en bien. “Que la Virgen María nos ayude a ser constructores de paz hacia todos, sobre todo hacia quien es hostil con nosotros y no nos gusta”, concluyó.

No somos cristianos si nos hacemos la guerra unos a otros



Nube de humo después de los bombardeos en las afueras de Kiev, Ucrania, el 27 de febrero de 2022, luego de que Rusia lanzara una operación militar masiva contra Ucrania. (Foto del CNS/Irakli Gedenidze, Reuters)

Ayer el Papa en el Ángelus, comentando el Evangelio en el que Jesús dice a los discípulos que amen a sus enemigos, dijo: “¡Qué triste es, cuando personas y pueblos que se enorgullecen de ser cristianos ven a los demás como enemigos y piensan en hacerse la guerra!” Tal vez estemos lo suficientemente locos como para hacernos la guerra entre nosotros. Una guerra en Europa con consecuencias inimaginables. Pero al menos no nos digamos cristianos. Estamos jugando con fuego. Quizá no nos bastan las guerras invisibles, esas guerras mundiales que cada año causan millones de muertos por

hambre y pobreza, por enfermedades evitables, por la violencia de tantos conflictos olvidados, por la criminalidad de todos los días, por los accidentes en el trabajo o por esa guerra oculta que se llama soledad, exclusión, explotación, indiferencia. Luego está la guerra de la que ya no tenemos más conciencia: aquella contra nuestros hijos asesinados en el vientre de sus madres. Quizás es la guerra más invisible. Quién sabe si algún día los descendientes nos condenarán por esta masacre silenciosa. Quien no ve estas grandes guerras da por sentada su pequeña paz. No nos condenemos a repetir los errores del pasado.

Tal vez no nos basta la pandemia que ya ha asolado a toda la humanidad, matando sin distinción y empobreciendo a los más pobres y enriqueciendo aún más a algunos ricos. Y hoy solo las amenazas de guerra aumentan la pobreza de muchos y la riqueza de unos pocos. Preocupan las rabias y los odios que se arremolinan en el mundo: los arranques de violencia, las palabras de desprecio, las explosiones de ferocidad. Preocupan las ofensas e insultos entre los mismos cristianos. Jesús dijo que nos reconocerán por el amor que nos tenemos unos a otros. En cambio, basta con echar un vistazo a las redes sociales y a los blogs: a menudo asistimos a enfrentamientos y agresiones mutuas sin frenos, quizá en nombre de la verdad y la justicia. San Pablo dice a los gálatas: “Si os mordéis y os devoráis mutuamente, ¡mirad no vayáis mutuamente a destruirlos!” (Gálatas 5,15). Pero si nos hacemos la guerra entre nosotros que creemos en el Evangelio, ¿cómo podemos pedir a los demás que no la hagan? El Evangelio nos pide que amemos a nuestros enemigos, que vencamos el mal con el bien. Parece una utopía. Tal vez seamos tan locos como para hacernos la guerra unos a otros. Pero al menos no nos digamos cristianos.

Company's Ukraine candle sales fund relief efforts

SAM LUCERO
Catholic News Service

STURGEON BAY, Wis. — "It's better to light one candle than to curse the darkness."

This ancient proverb — made famous by Maryknoll Father James Keller, after he founded The Christophers in 1945 — has taken on a new meaning for Christiana Gorchynsky Trapani, owner of Door County Candle Co. in Sturgeon Bay.

With war now raging in Ukraine, home to many of Trapani's relatives, the Catholic business owner came up with the idea of making and selling what is called the Ukraine Candle.

The 16-ounce candle is made of blue and yellow wax, colors of the Ukrainian flag, with a vanilla scent. Trapani said 100% of the profits from sales of these candles will support relief efforts in Ukraine.

"We actually did a fundraiser with a Ukrainian Catholic school in Chicago, St. Nicholas Cathedral School, a few months back," she said. "When this happened, the idea came, 'Let's use this candle to donate all the profits to this 501(c)(3) called Razom.' I kind of pulled it together and it's working out."

Razom, which means "together" in Ukrainian, is using donations to provide critical medical supplies for Ukrainians injured in the war, according to its website, razomforukraine.org.

In an interview with The Compass, newspaper of the Diocese of Green Bay, Wisconsin, Trapani said that after Russia invaded Ukraine, "I was feeling helpless and heartbroken."

"It is just hard to believe that in this day and age, this could still happen," she said. "I just needed to do something to help. While continuing the prayers is important, I wanted to do more. I am so happy that we can work with the power of prayer and also the power of awareness."

Trapani, 28, was born in Chicago and proudly boasts that she's "100% Ukrainian."

"Both of my parents (Natalie and George Gorchynsky) are Ukrainian and both sets of my grandparents were born in Ukraine," she said. "I grew up with a lot of Ukrainian roots and heritage, and I'm really proud of my Ukrainian background. I'm so happy that it was my first language and we still speak it fluently."

Trapani and her husband, Nic, were married Sept. 28,

2019, at Stella Maris Church in Baileys Harbor, Wisconsin.

"My husband is not Ukrainian, but he has definitely learned a lot of words and sentences," she said. "We were able to combine some Ukrainian Catholic traditions into our wedding at Stella Maris, which was pretty cool."

Before moving back to Sturgeon Bay in 2019, Trapani attended graduate school at Marquette University in Milwaukee. While engaged, she and Nic attended St. John the Evangelist Cathedral and took marriage preparation classes there.

They started Door County Delivered, a gift box business, when they moved to Sturgeon Bay. Through this business, they met the owner of Door County Candle Co. and purchased it from him in June 2021.

The candle company employs seven people, but since it began selling the Ukrainian Candle Feb. 26, several local residents — including her parents and husband — have volunteered to help respond to requests for candles.

"I posted a video on Facebook Saturday, and since then we've sold 8,000 candles," which sell for \$29.95, she said. "We definitely weren't prepared for that many. We are out of fragrance, so we are calling the companies to expedite it and do whatever we can, so that's a little stressful, but we are doing our best."

Trapani said she is not surprised by the response for candles. "People want to help. I'm surprised how many wanted to help in this way," she said. "It's incredible. I'm very grateful."

Many of the people who visit the store have roots in Ukraine, said Trapani.

"We had a family from Green Bay come yesterday and they are from Ukraine. It was the little daughter's birthday, so we got to dip the Ukrainian Candle together and we just got to talk and connect," she said.

Trapani said she has never been to Ukraine. A planned family trip was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, she said. "We were supposed to go, the whole family, but unfortunately it kept getting pushed and pushed and now I'm heartbroken that we didn't get a chance to make it."

She still holds out hope to visit. "I will. I hope it can be sooner than later." Her relatives, including one aunt, live in the western part of Ukraine. "They are safe, but terrified," she said.



Christiana Gorchynsky Trapani, owner of Door County Candle Co. in Sturgeon Bay, Wis., works on Ukrainian Candles which are being sold there as a fundraiser to support victims of war in Ukraine March 1, 2022. Trapani is an Ukrainian American who has family living in the Ukraine. (CNS photo/Sam Lucero, The Compass)

Trapani asked that people keep praying for an end to the war in Ukraine.

"Keep looking for ways to help," she added. "Whether it's through us or another way. I just

think it's important to raise awareness and help."

Editor's note: For more information about the Ukraine Candles, visit doorcountycandle.com.

SAINT MARY
STAR OF THE SEA SCHOOL

*Saint Mary Star of the Sea
School Casino & Auction is Back!*

Saturday, April 30, 2022
 6 to 9:30 p.m., School Gym

\$50/person

\$75/couple

50/50 Raffle Tickets: Purchase a 50/50 raffle ticket for \$100 and get one complimentary admission to the event, plus the chance to win the \$5,000 top prize or one of five \$1,000 prizes. Need not be present to win.

Purchase event tickets, 50/50 raffle tickets,
 Sponsorships & Register to Bid at:
charityauction.bid/smssauction2022

Questions: Contact Robin Ciraulo at
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