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Knot it!



During competition at the FIRST LEGO League World Championships in Houston last month, members of Clueless, the St. Bridget School, Richmond, robotics team, complete a human knot challenge while awaiting a turn to run their robot. See story, Page 10. (Photo/Eric De Boer)

Pope willing to meet Putin in Moscow Kremlin has not responded

CINDY WOODEN
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis' secretary of state reaffirmed the pope's offer to go to Moscow personally to try to convince President Vladimir Putin to stop his war on Ukraine but said the Kremlin had yet to respond.

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, secretary of state, told reporters late May 4, "There has been an offer from the Holy Father to go to Moscow to meet personally with President Putin. We are waiting for them to tell us what they want, what they intend to do."

"I think that at this point there are no other steps to take," the cardinal said.

In an interview with the Italian newspaper, Corriere della Sera, published May 3, Pope Francis said he had had Cardinal Parolin send his offer to Putin in mid-March in an attempt to convince the Russian president to stop the war or, at least, to respect humanitarian corridors to evacuate innocent civilians.

"We still have not had a response, and we are still being persistent, even though I am afraid Putin may not be able to and may not want to have this meeting right now," the pope had said. "I am doing what I can. If Putin were to open the door. ..."

Although the pope said he was willing to go to Moscow, he repeated his decision not to accept an invitation from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to visit Kyiv "for now" because he did not think doing so would help stop the war.

Many people, especially Ukrainians, are disappointed that the pope will not go to Kyiv and has not condemned Putin or Russia by name.

Some also expressed concern that the pope seemed to be overly understanding of Putin's reasons for invading Ukraine. The Corriere article said Pope Francis "also attempted to reason about the roots of this behavior, about the motivations that drive him to such a brutal war. Perhaps 'NATO's barking at Russia's door' led the head of the Kremlin to react badly and to trigger the conflict."

Pope Francis told the newspaper that he could not say the possible expansion of NATO "provoked" Putin, but he wondered if it "perhaps facilitated it."

Meanwhile, Archbishop Paolo Pezzi of Moscow said in an interview May 6 the hope that dialogue will work is always the Christian position.

"I believe that our hopes, but perhaps also those of the pope, are based primarily on one aspect, namely that the other is never an enemy: he is 'other,' 'other than us,' different and probably has different existential positions, but he is still a child of God, a man, a created

See Pope, Page 16

News service to end US operation Only CNS Rome bureau will continue

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops announced to staff May 4 a dramatic reorganization of its communications department, including the closure of the Washington and New York offices of Catholic News Service.

In meetings with newsroom staff, James Rogers, the chief communications officer of the conference, said that the Washington office would be closed at year's end.

The Rome bureau of Catholic News Service will remain open and continue to report on Vatican and related international events.

A statement released by the bishops' public affairs office said: "Over the next few months, the USCCB Department of Communications will undertake a significant realignment to better utilize the resources entrusted to the Conference by the faithful in a manner that fits the communications environment today.

"Sadly, this will impact a number of staff. We are grateful for the time and dedication of the committed team of communicators at the Conference who serve the Church; job transitions can be difficult, and as this is a personnel matter, further detail will not be discussed at this time."

The statement continued: "Catholic News Service offices in New York and Washington will be closed at the end of the year, as will the USCCB Publishing Office. These changes, although painful, will allow the remaining functions — including the Catholic News Service Rome Bureau and the Office of Public Affairs — a more sustainable foundation upon which to do their work."

Effective Jan. 1, 2023, Catholic News Service will cease to charge clients for its coverage. It will make its Rome coverage available to all U.S. dioceses at no charge starting in 2023.

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Commitment to peace requires us to live what Christ taught



CHRIST OUR HOPE
MOST REV. BARRY C. KNESTOUT

More than seven weeks after we joined Pope Francis in praying the Act of Consecration of Russia and Ukraine to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, we continue to pray for peace between those two countries. The Act of Consecration is a great source of reflection as we ask our Blessed Mother, the Queen of Peace, to guide the hearts of those who wage war and to sustain the Spirit in those harmed by it.

Our Holy Father turned in sorrow and prayer to Our Lady, saying: “We have forgotten our humanity and squandered the gift of peace. We opened our hearts to violence and destructiveness. How greatly we need your maternal help!”

While his focus was specifically upon Russia and Ukraine, his words apply to what we are experiencing in our communities, nation and throughout the world. Violence, in its various forms, has seeped into many facets of our lives — to the point that what was once rare, unexpected and shocking has become commonplace and accepted as a fact of life. Indeed, such a mindset is in need of Our Lady’s maternal help.

Consider these powerful words in the pope’s prayer: “We grew sick with greed, we thought

only of our own nations and their interests, we grew indifferent and caught up in our selfish needs and concerns.

“We chose to ignore God, to be satisfied with our illusions, to grow arrogant and aggressive, to suppress innocent lives and to stockpile weapons.”

In those sentences are multiple points with which we could examine our personal and collective consciences — in particular, “We chose to ignore God.” While we have faith in God and work at deepening our relationship with him, it is evident that large segments of our culture and our world do not. Researchers regularly release studies showing that fewer people believe in God. Their illusions, arrogance and aggressiveness have resulted in the moral ailments that sicken our society.

Discouraging as it is to be constantly challenged by the thoughts and actions of those who do not know God, we have no reason to throw up our hands and concede defeat. As Pope Francis prayed: “Holy Mother, amid the misery of our sinfulness, amid our struggles and weaknesses, amid the mystery of iniquity that is evil and war, you remind us that God never abandons us, but continues to look upon us with love, ever ready to forgive us and raise us up to new life.”

As believers, we know of the love and mercy of God, we *know* that he never abandons us! Let’s take this further. Because we have experi-

enced that love, mercy and new life, we have an obligation — the obligation Jesus gave to us when he said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Mt 28:19-20).

Our desire for and commitment to peace requires us to demonstrate that we *live* what Christ taught. We are part of the answer to that prayer for peace. Alone, we are not going to end aggression in Ukraine nor the violence in our communities. However, intentionally living our Catholic faith in communion, adhering to a life focused upon growing closer to Jesus and, as a result, sharing his love with others, we will make a difference.

Praying for peace cannot be something reserved only for crisis situations. It must be a prominent thread in our spiritual lives. Near the conclusion of the Act of Consecration, Pope Francis prayed words we would also do well to pray:

“Our Lady of the ‘fiat,’ on whom the Holy Spirit descended, restore among us the harmony that comes from God. May you, our ‘living fountain of hope,’ water the dryness of our hearts. In your womb Jesus took flesh; help us to foster the growth of communion.”

Peace be with you!

Pope enlists elderly for ‘revolution of tenderness’

CAROL GLATZ

Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis said he is convinced God is calling his peers — older Catholics — to become “artisans of the revolution of tenderness.”

Through their gifts, wisdom, relationships and power of prayer, “together we can set the world free from the specter of loneliness and the demon of war,” the pope wrote in his message for the Catholic Church’s celebration of the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly.

The message was released at the Vatican May 10 in anticipation of the celebration July 24, the fourth Sunday of July and the Sunday closest to the feast of Sts. Joachim and Anne, Jesus’ grandparents.

“Old age is no time to give up and lower the sails, but a season of enduring fruitfulness; a new mission awaits us and bids us look to the future,” the pope wrote in his message, whose theme for 2022 is “In old age they will still bear fruit” from the Book of Psalms.

In addition to taking care of themselves and remaining active, “we ought to cultivate our interior life through the assiduous reading of the word of God, daily prayer, reception of the sacraments and participation in the liturgy” as well as “cultivate our relationships with others.”

Older people need to show “affectionate concern for our families, our children and grandchildren, but also for the poor and those who suffer, by drawing near to them with practical assistance and our prayers,” he wrote.

“Old age is no time to give up and lower the sails, but a season of enduring fruitfulness; a new mission awaits us and bids us look to the future.”

— Pope Francis

But the entire world is also “passing through a time of trial and testing, beginning with the sudden, violent outbreak of the pandemic, and then by a war that is harming peace and development on a global scale” as well as a war in Europe “at a time when the generation that experienced it in the last century is dying out,” he wrote.

“These great crises risk anesthetizing us to the reality of other ‘epidemics’ and other widespread forms of violence that menace the human family and our common home,” he wrote, which is why older people have an important role to play in promoting “profound change” starting in people’s hearts.

“We grandparents and elderly people have a great responsibility: to teach the women and men of our time to regard others with the same understanding and loving gaze with which we regard our own grandchildren.

“We ourselves have grown in humanity by caring for others, and now we can be teachers of a way of life that is peaceful and attentive to

those in greatest need” and thereby help protect the world, he wrote.

The pope appealed to older people to extend their prayers and attention to all children of the world, especially those fleeing from war or suffering its effects. “Let us hold in our hearts — like St. Joseph, who was a loving and attentive father — the little ones of Ukraine, of Afghanistan, of South Sudan.”

Most older people have realized the world very much needs to work together and that it is wrong to think people “can find personal fulfillment and success in conflict,” he wrote.

“Dear grandparents, dear elderly persons, we are called to be artisans of the revolution of tenderness in our world” and “poets of prayers” by making “more frequent and better use of the most valuable instrument at our disposal,” that is, prayer.

The World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly is also an opportunity for young people and the Church to celebrate together with older people, by seeking out those who feel most alone.

“Expecting a visit can transform

those days when we think we have nothing to look forward to; from an initial encounter, a new friendship can emerge,” he said. “Visiting the elderly who live alone is a work of mercy in our time!”

At a news conference presenting the message May 10, Cardinal Kevin J. Farrell, prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, the Family and Life, said the pastoral care and importance of older people have been a major part of Pope Francis’ pontificate.

The pope wants to see not just sporadic events or projects dedicated to older people, but to make them an integral and active part of the Church community and society, he said.

In response to a reporter’s question about the pope’s increasing difficulty walking and current use of a wheelchair, the cardinal said the 85-year-old pope is “a great example to all elderly.”

“He accepts his limitations at this moment with a great spirit and a great heart,” Cardinal Farrell said.

“We should not hide the fact that with age comes a lessening of our ability to play an active part in the life of the world today,” he said, however, the pope also shows that “with the limitations that he has physically and with age, he is not going to stop.”

“He sends a message to all of us that we all have to carry on” and do one’s best, the cardinal said.

Editor’s note: The text of Pope Francis’ message for World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly is available in English at <https://bit.ly/PopElderly22> and in Spanish at <https://bit.ly/PopeElderlyES>.

Serving those who serve

Chaplains minister to first responders, entire community



WENDY KLESCH

Special to The Catholic Virginian

National Emergency Services Week, held the third week of May each year, is a time to honor first responders, those dedicated to serving their communities.

It's also a time to remember those who serve the men and women who serve — EMS chaplains.

EMS chaplains are on call whenever there is need — to help first responders to cope with the challenges of the job and to support the greater community with care and compassion, to stand in witness to God's love.

"Whether they're Catholic or not is not important," said Father Stephen McNally, pastor of Church of the Transfiguration, Fincastle, and chaplain of Botetourt County Fire and EMS. "At that point — wearing that hat — it's about letting them know there are people who care about them."

'Where is God?'

As pastor of the only Catholic Church in a large county, Father McNally is well-known in his community. Each year, he said, he's invited to the Lenten lunches at the Methodist Church.

"The joke is that I pack the place because people want to hear the Catholic perspective. There's the Church of God, the Presbyterians, and then there's Father McNally," he said, laughing.

His unique role allows him not only to provide pastoral care to first responders, victims and their families, but also to act as a bridge between faiths, as a unifying presence in his community.

One emergency call, he said, brought him to the home of a fellow clergy member whose wife had suddenly passed away.

"I walked in, and I knew him," Father McNally said. "I was able to be there with him, and — at his

request — I was able to lead a prayer service when his two kids arrived. It was humbling, to be able to be there for his wife in the final moment of commending her soul to God."

It was humbling, too, he said, to have someone of another faith call upon him for solace and support.

"Everyone with a mind will say at one time or another, 'Where is God in the midst of this Ukraine war? Where is God in the midst of another gun homicide in Roanoke?'" he said. "The point is, God never abandons us. He's never away from us. The question is, how do we deal with each other?"

We share much more in common than what divides us, he said. We can treat one another with compassion in times of trial.

Inspired by his godfather, a New York City police lieutenant, Father McNally originally considered a career in law enforcement. He earned a degree in criminal justice before he went to the seminary, and, as a pastor, he's made it a part of his ministry to support first responders.

He's served as chaplain at the U.S. Embassy in Bonn, Germany, and as chaplain for the police and sheriff's office of Bedford County.

He's been there, he said, at the homes of strangers and of parishioners alike, in their darkest hours.

In 2006, he was out on an errand, he said, when he received a phone call from a man representing the International Conference of Police Chaplains, asking him how far he was from Blacksburg.

"And then he told me about the

mass shooting at Virginia Tech," he said.

Father McNally went at once to keep vigil with parents who had gathered in a tent, waiting for the victims to be identified.

"I waited with them. I prayed with them. There was water available, but there were no answers."

"You have to be OK with people's tears, including your own," he said. "I used to hate that about myself. I felt weak and foolish in front of people. It was a rabbi who told me in my earliest days, 'You think that's your worst enemy right now, but let me tell you, if you are ordained as a priest, you will find it's your greatest asset.' He was spot on."

Going forth

Father Chris Hess, pastor of St. Anne, Bristol; St. Bernard, Gate City; and St. Patrick, Dungannon, has a combined 17 years of experience with EMS. Beginning in 1993 with the Kempsville Volunteer Rescue Squad in Virginia Beach, he went on to serve as a full-time firefighter in Poquoson before entering the seminary in 2006.

Ordained in 2012, Father Hess was assigned to Sacred Heart in Prince George County the following year, where he served as a volunteer firefighter with Disputanta Company 2 and as Prince George County Fire and EMS chaplain.

He was inspired to continue serving, Father Hess said, after he met a group of combat veterans at a mental health facility who suffered

from PTSD-related issues.

"Every one of them told me that their biggest frustration about being in a facility like that was having to speak to a therapist who had never been in combat," he said.

"I've never been in combat. I can't relate to their experience. But when it comes to fire and EMS, that is something that I know and that I can relate to," Father Hess said.

He has seen changes in the field over the years, he said. Today, there is a greater emphasis on being proactive, on encouraging first responders to talk about their experiences and on peer support.

"Some people might wonder, 'Why are you doing this?'" he said. "You are a pastor, why are you out riding with the fire department?"

The answer, he said, is that being pastor means more than pastoring a single church, but rather an entire community.

"I saw parts of Prince George County that I never would have seen if it weren't for the work that I did with the fire department. I was in people's homes, in some of the poorest parts of the county," he said.

Sitting in his office, he said, he heard of how the opioid crisis was affecting local families. Working with the fire department, he saw the devastation it wreaked firsthand.

His medical experience has also allowed him a greater understanding of those who seek his counsel in times of sickness.

"It's strengthened my faith. I'm definitely stronger as a pastor due to the things I've experienced with EMS. It's been a privilege to serve," he said.

A time to console

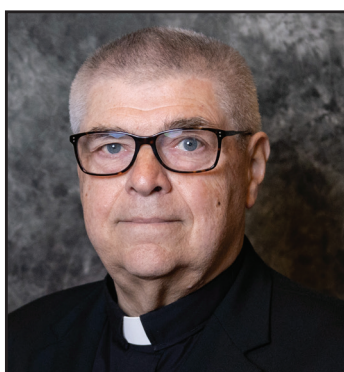
Deacon Robert Straub of Sacred Heart, Prince George County; St. John Nepomucene, Dinwiddie; and St. James the Greater, Hopewell, is a chaplain for Prince George Fire and EMS.

He started two years ago, he said, when his pastor at Sacred Heart, Father Hess, and Father David Kirk, pastor at Fort Lee — where Deacon Straub also has faculties with the Archdiocese of Military Services — encouraged him to get involved.

His 20 years of experience in the Army, he said, also inspired him to serve.

"In the Army, I had several instances where I've had to be a consoler for people involved in various accidents," he said. "That's been my background."

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Father Stephen McNally



Father Christopher Hess



Deacon Robert Straub



Father Daniel Molochko

St. Timothy Parish remains beacon of faith

Tappahannock church celebrates golden anniversary

KRISTEN L. BYRD
Special to The Catholic Virginian

Near the banks of the Rappahannock River sits St. Timothy Catholic Church, home to a small but strong community. The parishioners can measure their milestones by the sacraments they've received within its walls. Baptism, first reconciliation, first Eucharist, confirmation and marriage were all celebrated here.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the parish officially becoming part of the Diocese of Richmond, and it celebrated its golden jubilee on May 1 with a Mass celebrated by Bishop Barry C. Knestout.

This sprawling yet tight-knit Tappahannock community dates back long before 1972. In the early 20th century, there was no proper Catholic church in the area; the nearest one was hours away. The devout spent entire Sundays traveling to and from Mass.

Over time, as the Catholic population grew and became more organized, members of the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity, known as "Trinitarians," who served the rural South, would travel to Tappahannock to celebrate Holy Communion.

In 1940, the original St. Timothy church was completed. During construction, missionary priests would celebrate Masses in schools and theatres. St. Timothy served as a mission church until 1972. From one generation to the next, the parish has remained as a beacon of the Catholic faith, with some members still traveling many miles, passing other closer Catholic churches along the way, to walk through its doors.

The community is as diverse as the landscape. Established families converge with the growing Hispanic community. Retirees worship alongside children. It is plagued by poverty in some parts with a lack of employment opportunities, but the community bands together despite economic, cultural and language barriers to continue the work of St. Timothy.

Father Gerald Musuubire has been pastor of St. Timothy since July 2019. He said there are also geographical hurdles to worshipping at the parish.

"Rivers, swamps, creeks — those things kind of separate us," he said. "They distribute us differently, but with the spirit the people have for the parish, it is not an issue. They still come."

Golden opportunity

Father Musuubire sees the golden jubilee as a golden opportunity to bring the community together after COVID. To him, the pandemic only made St. Timothy stronger.

"The pandemic was a blessing in disguise because although it kept us physically distant, it has still brought us together. Now we care about each other more. It helped us realize how important we are to each other," he said, noting that parishioners are now more apt to check in with one another, to talk to each other more and to offer help.

Pat Hirsch and her family have been mem-



Bishop Barry C. Knestout, assisted by Father Gerald Musuubire, pastor of St. Timothy, Tappahannock, confirmed eight parishioners, including Marco Valdez, during the Mass at which the parish celebrated its 50th anniversary, Sunday, May 1. Gabriela Valdez was Marco's sponsor. (Submitted photo)

bers of the parish since 2004. While it was a major adjustment moving from a large parish in Richmond to Tappahannock, she felt welcomed by the small family she found at St. Timothy. She serves as a lector and is on the sacred linens committee.

Hirsch has also served on the pastoral council, where she proposed St. Timothy join an existing program where various churches come together to provide a free monthly community dinner. Though COVID put a stop to it, she hopes it restarts soon. She also hopes more people learn of the many great works St. Timothy participates in and how it welcomes people of different cultural backgrounds.

"I would like people to know about us and the outreach efforts we do all year long," she said. "I would like all to know we have a thriving Hispanic ministry at St. Timothy. I believe our Hispanic community gives our church a broader dimension of living out our Christian faith."

With the golden jubilee, many were excited for the bishop to get to know the community.

"The main thing is to celebrate Christ, who has been in our presence since the beginning," said Father Musuubire.

He credits the parish's very survival to the

strength and dedication of the community. Each time the parish was faced with an obstacle, they overcame it together. From raising money for a church building to providing community support to relying on visiting priests to paying its debt early, St. Timothy has always risen to the challenge.

While St. Timothy is no longer a mission church, it is a church with a mission. Several outreach programs are dedicated to helping the entire region.

St. Timothy is active in Essex Churches Together (ECT), a group made up of members of various denominations in Essex County who collaborate for social justice projects. They meet

regularly to discuss the needs of different ministries and organize events to help. This can include anything from a food or clothes drive to helping pay medical or electricity bills for some residents.

'Blessed to be a member'

Bill Carreras has been a member of St. Timothy for nearly his entire life; he formed his faith, friendships and family there. In boyhood, he and his brother were altar servers and were also tasked with cleaning the church and maintaining the grounds. Their mother taught CCD classes in their home, and priests would transport children from all over Tappahannock and neighboring towns to attend. His two daughters were baptized and confirmed in the church and still attend when they are home visiting.

"I witnessed my parents, other Catholic families and the missionary priests live their commitment to the faith, demonstrating the importance of a Catholic community," Carreras said. "These values remain with me, and I consider it a blessing to have been a member of St. Timothy's from the beginning."

Carreras has served as a sacristan for the past 20 years. He was on the parish council and the committee to build the new church, which was completed in 2000 after the parish raised \$1.1 million.

"Just to be a part of the church community has been rewarding," he said. "From what we started from to what we've grown to, I think it's amazing to survive this long."

Having reached its 50th anniversary, the parish looks to the future.

While Tappahannock is a popular spot for vacationers during the summer months, St. Timothy has few young couples and children. Father Musuubire hopes to change that by building a strong youth group.

"My work is to take care of their spiritual welfare," he said. "Through our faith, we have also tried to form the kids morally so they can thrive in society."

That goal looks promising. Eight youth were confirmed on May 1 during the jubilee Mass — the highest number in recent memory.

Father Musuubire is also studying Spanish in hopes of strengthening his connection to the Hispanic community.

"It is our togetherness that has brought us this far," he said.

"I witnessed my parents, other Catholic families and the missionary priests live their commitment to the faith, demonstrating the importance of a Catholic community. These values remain with me, and I consider it a blessing to have been a member of St. Timothy's from the beginning."

— Bill Carreras

Parish's care for Earth extends internationally

Pope Francis' encyclicals 'driving force' behind efforts at ICC, Hampton

JENNIFER NEVILLE

Special to The Catholic Virginian

Operating under the ethic that “the world is a gift to you and the people following you,” Immaculate Conception Catholic Church (ICC), Hampton, continues to implement environmental projects that will last decades, if not lifetimes.

“To care for our common home, Earth, and foster deeper social relationships with other communities beyond our own borders are moral values our parish seeks to promote and live out,” said Father John Grace, ICC pastor.

Committed to Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical “Laudato si’: On Care for Our Common Home,” the parish installed 440 solar panels on the church, administrative wing and classrooms in 2019 to become the first Virginia parish to be 100% solar, and it installed panels on the rectory in fall 2020.

The Lenten almsgiving for 2020 and for this year was to partner with The International Small Group Tree Planting Program (TIST), to provide a total of 11,000 trees to Kenyan farmers to plant and cultivate to offset carbon emissions.

In 2021, the parish raised \$17,000 for its Lenten project to purchase water filters for 250 families in the Navajo Nation in northern Arizona because about 40% of the Navajo living in the region, which is about the size of West Virginia, don't have access to clean water or electricity, Father Grace explained.

“Everything we're doing is creating things that will outlast us. Later generations will appreciate our efforts to preserve God's gift of creation,” Father Grace said.

Encyclicals drive efforts

For example, the solar panels



In November 2021, Father John Grace, pastor of Immaculate Conception, Hampton, worked with Water With Blessings to help build water filters in the Navajo Nation. ICC parishioners donated money to purchase the filters in order to provide clean drinking water for the residents. (Photo courtesy of Water With Blessings)

should last 35 years, the Kenyan farmers are obligated to cultivate the trees for at least 30 years and the water filters are lifelong.

The parish also serves fair trade coffee with doughnuts after Sunday Masses and sells fair trade products including coffee, cocoa and olive oil twice a month after weekend Masses. Last December, Equal Exchange recognized ICC as being in the top 5% of all religious organizations in the country moving its fair trade products.

“Laudato si'” and the pope's 2020 encyclical “Fratelli tutti” are the driving force behind ICC's efforts, Father Grace said.

“Laudato si'” stresses that climate change is a global problem with grave environmental, social, economic and political implications, and everything in creation is interconnected and humans must be stewards of it. Likewise, in “Fratelli tutti,” he speaks on how everyone is connected and must assist each other.

This year, the Laudato Si' Action Platform is beginning. It invites all Catholic individuals, churches and organizations to embark upon a seven-year journey to embrace integral ecology. The platform includes goals for families, parishes and dioceses, schools and universities, businesses and farms, religious congregations, and hospitals and other health care facilities.

The goals include adopting renewable energy, achieving carbon neutrality, defending all life, solidarity with indigenous peoples and vulnerable groups, adopting a simpler lifestyle, fostering ecological education and spirituality, advocating for sustainable development and following ethical investment guidelines, including divestment from fossil fuels and other industries that harm the planet, explained Earthbeat on its website.

'Laying spiritual footing'

This year, the ICC Care for Creation Team will determine a plan for implementing the platform. They will study the book “On Care of Our Common Home,” which will help them better understand “Laudato si'” and “lay the spiritual groundwork for what we need to do and kind of put us on a common footing,” said James Wells, co-coordinator of the team.

Anna DeHaven, who serves on ICC's Care for Creation Team, said, “It's super important to restore the beautiful creation that God made because it sustains life.”

“Basically, if we work on the environment, if we help the environment, if we bring it back, restore it to how God originally created it, then we're helping people as Christ calls us to do,” DeHaven said. “I want to do my part to help bring it back to where it needs to be, and I think I can do more as part of a group like that at Immaculate Conception than by myself.”



In 2020, Mike Stefanko, left, long-time parishioner at Immaculate Conception, Hampton, and two unidentified volunteers planted one of five trees on the parish grounds in solidarity with Kenya. This fall, the parish will plant six more. (Photo/Cheryl Browne)

Wells said he encounters God in nature, and he feels an obligation to make sure a healthy environment is “available for everyone.”

“We're supposed to be part of it, not dominate over it and abuse it,” he said.

Father Grace explained that any environmental project the parish does must meet certain criteria, some of which are being sustainable and long term, being well-managed by another organization, using environmentally sound methodology, pushing against climate change at some level, fostering healthy communities especially among those lacking resources, making a difference (often small) in the real world and encompassing the values of the Church as articulated in “Laudato si'.”

Everyone has a role

TIST meets those criteria. The program enables ICC to care for the physical environment, help struggling communities beyond its borders, foster relationships with people outside the country and empower communities to work together to improve their circumstances, Father Grace said.

Africa produces 3.7% of the world's greenhouse gases, but over 65% of the continent is negatively affected by climate change, Father Grace said. However, since TIST's inception in 1999, more than 131,000 farmers in Kenya, Uganda, India and Tanzania have collectively planted more than 23 million trees and captured over 10 million metric tons of carbon dioxide, according to the organization's website. The farmers have created a carbon sequestration program in which multi-national corporations pay into to reduce their own carbon footprint throughout the world.

The farmers work in small groups and at the grass roots level, Father Grace explained. They determine the type of tree to grow and where it should be planted. Typically trees are planted on degraded soil or unused property. They provide food, shade, heal degraded land, improve water sources and reduce carbon in the air.

The local community is engaged in the common mission and led by local leadership.

“This is the key to their success: all are part of the effort, and everyone matters in caring for the environment,” he said. “Children are raised with a sense of responsibility and learn the skills they need to become full and active participants in the community's efforts.”

Make the world better

TIST is not a religious organization, but Father Grace said it is in line with “Laudato si'” teachings. Therefore, the parish raised \$5,000 to purchase 5,000 trees in 2020 for farmers in three Catholic communities in Kenya and \$6,000 for 6,000 trees this year. Those particular communities received a large benefit from the carbon pricing this year and decided to use the profits to pay the fees for every child to go to school.

“In other words, we're not just putting a tree out there. We're giving resources for other people to make choices that build up their agency of improving the planet and making choices that are the best for their community,” Father Grace said. “It's not a charity. You are literally investing in community.”

ICC also raised funds to plant five trees on the ICC campus in 2020 “in solidarity with Kenya” and will plant six more this fall.

Such action is in line with Father Grace's belief that creation is a gift that must be nurtured and protected.

“I came into this world way back when, and a lot of wonderful things were there. I didn't create them, but I got to enjoy them. Therefore, a moral responsibility I feel that I have is, in my own way, make sure the world is better,” Father Grace said.

“We're all in this together, and we do what we can at the level that we can,” he continued. “I think that's the spirit of Laudato si'.”

Editor's note: Donations to either the tree or water projects may be made on the ICC website at icchampton.org or weshareonline.org.

Pro-life stories are happening everyday

GUEST COMMENTARY

LAURA BELCHAK
CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

Today (Wednesday, April 27), a reporter asked me and my family why we were at the Virginia March for Life. I didn't have much to say then, but now that I have had time to reflect, I would like to share my story.

Of course, I have a pro-life story. I'm alive! But being the third child of a member of Feminists For Life doesn't seem as remarkable as the stories in my life that aren't mine to tell.

My son is the result of a pro-life story that started about 27 years ago when his mother chose life. My husband's mother, unmarried, in medical school, chose life for her son. She chose to raise him even though it would be hard, even though

the situation was not ideal, even though she had no money and a lot of student debt.

She had every reason to make a different choice, but she chose life. My son would not exist today if she had not chosen to give my husband life. She is now a very happy grandmother.

Because of what my husband learned from his mother, he told me that he wanted a good foundation for us before we had children. We had our son after we were married and had moved into our first house. I am raising my year-old son, Benjamin, as his mother, at home, because my husband made responsible choices, and because he learned from his mother's story.

My niece is a fantastic 12-year-old girl. She is a pro-life story, too. She was born to her mother at 20 years old, while she was unmarried and in college. My brother, her father, didn't have a job. But they chose life. My brother stepped up, like

a man, and worked any job he could to support them.

They got married. Eventually they had two more children, and they are doing well today. They came to the march with me. As her god-mother and her aunt, I could not imagine my life without my niece. She is the best and smartest kid I know.

Pro-life stories like ours happen every day. They are ordinary people making extraordinary sacrifices for love and for life. A choice for life is a choice for joy.

We march today to tell men and women who aren't sure, who are scared and feel alone, that it gets better. Choose life. Choose love. Choose joy.

Laura Belchak is a member of St. Rose of Lima and the Korean Martyrs Parishes, Hampton.

Proclaim Gospel with conviction

GUEST COMMENTARY

BISHOP JOHN E. STOWE
CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

Pope Francis has given great emphasis to the importance of listening during the synodal process underway in the universal Church. He teaches that to be an effective teaching Church ("ecclesia docens") we must also be a learning Church ("ecclesia discens"); listening is an essential part of learning.

Pope Francis, himself an effective teacher, shows the way and is widely known as an engaged listener. The first phase of the universal synodal consultation is essentially a collection of listening sessions going on throughout the world which will be distilled, synthesized and presented to the Office of the Synod in Rome.

My own experience, similar to that of many other bishops across the country, is that our people were eager to be heard but not especially familiar with processes that asked for their voice. Listening itself has been an important lesson as we embark on this synodal path.

What are we hearing? What is being said? As novel as the listening process has proven to be, obviously someone has to speak for that listening to take place. If bishops and pastors have been invited to listen especially to voices that we have not always been attentive to, we have to make sure that there are opportunities for someone to speak out on behalf of those voices.

I have frequently summarized Pope Francis' directives to the participants in the Synod of Bishops on the Family as "speak boldly and listen charitably." The pope has lamented that when given the opportunity and the optimal setting for speaking openly, there is often a hesitancy to say what is truly on one's mind for fear that another will disagree, or that the speaker will



be viewed unfavorably or offend someone by speaking openly.

There are appropriate moments for voicing disagreement, for presenting an unconsidered facet of an argument, for acknowledging the value of underrepresented points of view and even for challenging notions that have gone unchallenged even if it is unpopular to do so. The synodal sessions are indeed ideal for this kind of "speaking out."

Of the many words that Pope Francis has introduced or reintroduced to our lexicon, one of his frequently employed terms (often left untranslated) is parrhesia, described as boldness or conviction, which the Holy Father insists is vital to the proclamation of the Gospel today and also needed in our interactions within the Church. Paul's letter to Timothy insists that God's Spirit is not timid (2 Tim 1:7).

The Holy Father himself has not been timid in calling the world's attention to the peripheries: from migrants drowning in the Mediterranean Sea to the plight of Ukrainian women and children refugees fleeing the destruction of armed violence in their homeland.

The Church must be a voice for the voiceless as witnessed by St. Oscar Romero, who paid the ultimate price for courageously speaking against soldiers taking the lives of the poor in El Salvador. Advocates for the sanctity of human life must be bold in speaking against the tak-

What now for the Pro-Life Movement?

It is anticipated that the United States Supreme Court will soon overturn Roe v. Wade. This has always been an ultimate goal of the pro-life movement.

It is well-documented that ending access to abortion will most impact poor women, and particularly poor women of color. That said, I wonder what the pro-life movement will now do to support these women.

Will pro-life politicians expand crucial programs for these women, particularly in terms of child care, health care and affordable housing?

Will the pro-life churches and religious groups substantially grow their social ministries to support these women?

Will the private religious schools that often sent their students to anti-abortion marches and demonstrations open their doors to serve significantly more economically disadvantaged children of single mothers?

I do wonder if pro-life activists will now just pack up their placards and bull-horns and go home, thinking that their mission has been accomplished.

In reality, their most important life-affirming mission is just beginning.

– Dr. Frank E. Morgan
Henrico

Found stories 'uplifting'

I wanted to commend you and your staff on the April 4, 2022, edition of The Catholic Virginian.

I found the stories on the Statue of St. Joseph, the Casa Alma and the Lenten service by the VCU and ODU campus ministries very uplifting and encouraging.

It reminded me of the words of St. Paul in the letter to Titus: "I want you to insist on these points, that those who have believed in God be careful to devote themselves to good works; these are excellent and beneficial to others" (3:8).

– Marc Montalbino
Richmond

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Diocesan schools' office honors top teachers

Our Lady of Mount Carmel's Brittany May receives Elizabeth Ann Seton Award

KRISTEN L. BYRD

Special to The Catholic Virginian

Teachers from across the Diocese of Richmond were honored at the annual Excellence in Catholic Education award ceremony on Wednesday, April 27. One teacher from each of the diocese's 23 Catholic schools received an award; three received a diocesan Award for Excellence in Catholic Education. Brittany May, a teacher at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic School, Newport News, received the prestigious Elizabeth Ann Seton Award.



Brittany May

Natasha Feher, data coordinator in the diocesan Office of Catholic Schools, explained that honorees were selected based upon their selfless work in service of the Gospel in word and deed, their dedication to Catholic education, their instructional expertise and their witness to their faith to help transform the lives of Catholic school students and communities.

"We are fortunate to have amazing teachers who selflessly dedicate themselves to their students by helping them grow both spiritually and academically," said Kelly Lazara, Diocese of Richmond superintendent of schools. "Being a Catholic school teacher is special; we can freely share our Catholic values and incorporate our faith into all of our lessons, allowing us to focus on the academic, social, emotional and spiritual needs of our students."

The award's namesake, Elizabeth Ann Seton, was the first United States-born saint. She is regarded as a founder of the country's parochial school system, dedicating her life to her calling as an educator and a Catholic.

'Gift to others'

Dominican Sister Anna Joseph, principal of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (OLMC), shared how May embodies many of Seton's qualities, such as compassion, patience and "her genuine desire to seek the true good of the other. She offers herself

as a gift to others, her students and colleagues alike, by words of support and encouragement that fortify and sustain them."

May has taught seventh and eighth grade history and civics at OLMC for eight years and has recently begun working with kindergartners in the library.

In nominating her, Sister Anna Joseph noted that even though May is a part-time employee, she is fully invested in her students' lives and is not only regarded as an exemplary educator, but a role model as well. The principal said the nominee strives to connect with students on a personal level.

In her history and civics lessons, May works to show how the present is tied to the past by analyzing and comparing current and historic events. She invites her students to examine modern culture with a Catholic lens by incorporating the lessons of Christ with her own.

May begins each school year by having her eighth graders analyze the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution in order for them to understand two of the most important documents in our nation's government. She then introduces passages from the Catechism of the Catholic Church and asks students to analyze the connections between them.

"From this, students understand that legitimate authority seeks the common good and is at the service of the dignity of the human person, and that the purpose of government is to protect the rights of the people," she said.

In nominating May, Sister Anna Joseph noted that May is an example of "faith, modesty and kindness" to the girls she teaches. She leads discussions on the pressures and challenges girls face. She advises them on how to stay true to their faith even when it's not popular and where to find modest yet stylish clothes. She is well aware of the effect social media has on girls and works to combat the filtered and fake perfection that trends daily.

"Middle schoolers are searching for truth and wrestling with questions like 'Who am I?' and 'How do I fit into this great big world?'" said May. "They want to know what's real. So much of what's presented on social media isn't real – it's the photoshopped version of life. So I look for ways to expose them to the good, true and beautiful through positive examples of real people."

May does this by inviting musicians, retired military personnel, collectors, professional parents and others to speak at her classes. She also has open and honest conversations about modern culture and aspects of her own life with her students. More importantly, she works to make sure each student knows their worth.

"Every child is unique, so my first goal is to know my students. I want them to know with deep assurance that they are valued and have an important place not only in my classroom, but even in our history," May noted.

The end of the school year does not bring an end to the relationships she has formed with her students. She prays for them long after they graduate and keeps in touch with many, even serving as a confirmation sponsor for some and leading high school retreats.

"For me, working in the field of Catholic education is not just a job. It's a vocation," she said. "I choose to work in a Catholic school because I know this is exactly where the Lord is calling me to serve. This is my mission."

'Taking care of each other'

The recipients of the diocesan Awards for Excellence in Catholic Education were Angela Cash of All Saints Catholic School, Richmond; Laura Hall of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School, Richmond; and Heather Kryz of St. Gregory the Great Catholic School, Virginia Beach.



Angela Cash

All Saints is unique in its diversity, with Catholics making up only 30% of the student population. Many students are African American, Hispanic and from other religious denominations. Middle school religion teacher Angela Cash works to welcome and engage each student, regardless of race or creed, in her classroom.

"When I walk through our doors, I fully understand that if the outside world could visit us for a day, they would walk away with the model on how to combat racism," she said. "Our diversity strengthens us. We celebrate all cultures under our roof, and I cannot count the times I have heard visitors say the one characteristic that shines through is how much like a family we are and the love they feel in the building. We take care of each other."

Cash has worked at All Saints

for 21 years and proudly proclaims, "Blue and green runs through my veins!" in honor of the school's colors. She uses creative ways to get her students to care about and feel included in her lessons, even if they aren't Catholic. One example of this is having her students make saint action figures while teaching about the saints' lives.

With her help, the school honors the growing Hispanic community by celebrating Dia de los Muertos. She also reached out to the National Black Catholic Seminarians Association to procure posters of Black Catholic seminarians that now adorn the walls of the school.

Cash sits on multiple committees aimed at diversity and inclusivity, such as the Strategic Planning, Equity and Diversity Committee and Black Catholics Initiative, as well as the Afghanistan Refugee Resettlement Committee.

Teaching the Catholic faith through action, Cash's students participate in food drives; collect toys for needy children; and send cards to soldiers, first responders and health care workers.

"Mrs. Cash is an extremely devoted teacher who brings her love for Jesus to her students and her fellow teachers each and every day," said All Saints principal George Elliott. "Her gentle voice and joyful laugh portrays the patience and love with which she teaches. She not only teaches this way, she truly treats people in a kind and loving way."

Modeling faith, discipleship

Laura Hall has spent three decades teaching science at Our Lady of Lourdes (OLL). She has seen the school grow both in size and diversity. She has watched it overcome obstacles, but 2020 brought one of the biggest challenges all schools faced with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hall serves on the School Safety Team, and her knowledge and input were vital in forming the school's COVID Safety Team. With her help, the school implemented practices to promote a safe learning environment for the school's students.

Principal Carey Jacobsen explained how Hall is always willing to help when needed, even if it means going out of her comfort zone. The school offered summer learning programs in 2021 for students who were struggling in the wake of the pandemic. Though Hall

See Teachers, Page 13

First grants from Women's Giving Circle total \$20,000

Three Richmond-area nonprofits benefit from pilot program

BRIAN T. OLSZEWSKI
The Catholic Virginian

Children will have beds in which to sleep, seniors will have an opportunity to stay connected with family and friends, and children who are victims of abuse will be able to speak about it in the language with which they are most comfortable, thanks to the first grants, totaling \$20,000, awarded at the Pastoral Center, Tuesday, May 3, by the Women's Giving Circle — Richmond.

The giving circle, a pilot initiative of the Diocese of Richmond's Catholic Community Foundation (CCF), had been under consideration by the CCF for several years, according to Maggie Keenan, director of planned giving for the CCF.

"Research shows that women in households make decisions about charitable giving, and that they like to do things collectively," she said. "The model for Women's Giving Circles across the U.S. has always been successful — secular or otherwise — so we felt this was the right time with our foundation and the relationships that have been built since the foundation has been around, and it just piqued the interest."

The Women's Giving Circle is composed of 18 members who received personal invitations or who read about it in one of the 19 parish bulletins in which the invitation appeared. Members under the age of 35 pay \$600 a year to belong, while those over 35 and older pay \$1,100. That money is placed into a fund with the CCF. Grants, decided upon by membership, are awarded to nonprofit organizations whose programs and services meet the needs of local communities and adhere to Catholic Social Teaching.

'Magical moment'

The Henrico Chapter of Sleep in Heavenly Peace, Inc. (www.shpbeds.org/chapter/va-henrico-co-co), which has no paid employees, received a \$7,500 grant to provide 27 fully furnished twin beds for children, 3-17 years old.

According to Curtis Marshall, chapter president, they receive requests for beds from children's parents, advocates, teachers and social service agencies, including Commonwealth Catholic Charities.

"Once you make a delivery for social services, you get legitimacy and they call you again," he said.

Noting that Sleep in Heavenly Peace is "the only organization providing handmade beds," Marshall, a retired law enforcement officer, said that because they are mobile, they provide service opportunities for schools, businesses and organizations.

"Volunteers are necessary, and we need good referrals," he said.

Marshall said that making a delivery, setting up the bed with mattress, sheets, comforter and pillows, and having the child walk into the room is a "magical moment."

"Not only do these kids not have a bed of their own, some are on the floor, some are on the couch with their siblings, some are with mom and dad," he said. "A lot of kids don't have a lot to call their own, so to have a bed to call your own, that's your own little safe space, that's a big deal."

Marshall said the organization is "about 50 beds in the hole" because the number of requests they receive is always greater than how many beds we have in stock.

"When people find out what we're doing," he said about potential donors, "it tends to tug at their heart strings a little bit."

Combating social isolation

Fajr "Faja" Mills, program director at St. Francis Home (www.saintfranchishome.org), was "super excited" when the home was awarded a \$7,500 grant to purchase the iN2L ("It's Never Too Late") Mobile Flex System — technology for a seniors and caregiver efficiency program.

"Our purpose and hope for residents is to bridge the gap between technology and seniors and technology and the rest of world," she said. "We're attempting in some small way to combat social isolation."

Mills noted that because St. Francis Home serves a low-income community, residents might not have tablets, cellphones or computers.

"I wanted to find a system I could introduce to our residents where they can gain independence and the social aspect where they can connect with family members and their loved ones," she said. "They will be able to touch the screen and tap on a photo and see relatives and friends. It also has Skype abilities so they can tap on a contact list and have interaction with them as well."

The mobility of the system provides Mills with options for working one-on-one in a resident's room, as well as using it with small and large groups.

"When we were awarded that grant, it just meant everything because I knew that we were moving in the right direction," she said. "Our residents will be able to have that connection through technology that they were missing."

Children are priority

Its name — Greater Rich-

mond-Stop Child Abuse Now (SCAN), Inc. (<http://grscan.com/programs/child-advocacy-center/>) — makes it clear that protecting children from abuse is its priority. At the heart of its mission, SCAN emphasizes compassion, humility and respect in services, according to Jeanine Harper, executive director.

The \$5,000 grant it received from the Women's Giving Circle is being used to enlist "highly trained interpreters to be present during child forensic interviews and/or family advocacy appointments with non-offending caregivers," according to Harper.

Among the services SCAN provides through its two Child Advocacy Centers are child forensic interviews, trauma focused treatment, referral to medical services and victim advocacy.

"If we have a child or adolescent from a Latino community and their caregivers coming to the Child Advocacy Center, oftentimes the caregiver may only speak Spanish or have limited English," Harper explained. "In the context of us wanting to be welcoming and sensitive to that, interpreters are important."

This is particularly true in the forensics interviews of victims.

"You want to make sure, even if they speak English, because it is about a trauma, interpreters are

available," she said. "It is important that the child can describe feelings and talk about what that experience was."

Harper noted that they have worked with Commonwealth Catholic Charities in providing interpreter services for the interviews.

"We need interpreters that are sensitive to the child and the caregiver," Harper said.

Expressing gratitude for the grant, she noted it connected the "sense of ministry and justice to vulnerable children."

With the interest and success generated by the Women's Giving Circle — Richmond, CCF envisions circles being established in other areas of the diocese.

"We hold the vision that next year the Women's Giving Circle — Richmond will grow in membership," Keenan said. "We also have an expressed interest right now to start one in the Williamsburg area. Ideally, we would like to see one in Roanoke, Virginia Beach and different geographic areas."

Editor's note: For further information about Women's Giving Circles, contact Maggie Keenan at 804-359-5661.

emotionally naked® truth about suicide

Join us for a compelling discussion on the devastating reality of suicide and what we can do to help loved ones facing this life-and-death crisis.



Karl S. Leonard



Anne Moss Rogers



Diana & Tom Leahy

Anne Moss Rogers, certified suicide prevention trainer and **emotionally naked®** motivational speaker, will guide us through the most taboo of subjects — suicide — including the mental illness and addiction that often trigger it. (<https://annemoss.com>) **Chesterfield County Sheriff Karl S. Leonard** will share his

law enforcement perspective and **Tom Leahy** will provide insight into **Beacon Tree Foundation**, created to address the fear and frustration of mental illness; navigate the mental health community; and find resources to help pay for treatment. (<https://www.beaontree.org>)

Saturday, June 4, 2022 | 10:00 am - 12 Noon

St. Gabriel Catholic Church | 8901 Winterpock Rd. | Chesterfield, VA 23832

This free event is hosted by Respect Life Ministry of St. Gabriel Catholic Church. Although optional, registration is encouraged at RespectLifeEvent@gmail.com to ensure enough seating.

Make a difference: Choose God's will over yours



IN LIGHT OF FAITH
BARBARA HUGHES

The saying, “Man proposes, and God disposes” certainly seemed true last week. Having tested positive for COVID-19, I spent most of Sunday morning rescheduling commitments that had been on my calendar for months. Although everyone was very understanding, their kindness did little to mitigate my disappointment.

While fretting over my situation, something I had read during Lent came to mind, which was that when we truly accept God's will, we are able to embrace with joy those minor irritations and suffering that are part of life. At the time, it seemed like a pretty high bar. It's one thing to accept suffering, but to embrace it with joy? Well, that's a whole different level of surrender.

However, as the days passed, I discovered that my week of isolation had a plus side. It allowed me to catch up on writing commitments that had been put on hold, but more importantly, it provided me with the opportunity to turn the week into a type of desert retreat.

Although I wasn't able to attend Mass and receive Eucharist every day, having to self-quarantine allowed me to devote more time

to prayer and spiritual reading, prompting me to recall another familiar saying: “When life hands you a lemon, make lemonade.”

I admit that my situation fell into the category of minor irritations rather than real suffering, and although it was an inconvenience, it actually turned out to be a blessing. Upon further reflection, I realize that the real challenge comes when a major life upheaval, that we neither cause nor can control, upends life as we know it.

We need look no further than the people in Ukraine or in any war-torn country to see what real suffering looks like. Pictures of starving children and victims of violence are part of the news cycle, which reduce my problems to petty annoyances at best.

It's easy to talk about embracing suffering with joy when we're sitting in the comfort of our home, but when we try to envision the suffering of so many less fortunate, I suspect most middle-class Americans fall short.

At times like this, the saying: “Bloom where you are planted” helps put things into right perspective. We will never understand why some people live their entire lives in countries where grief and suffering are daily occurrences, while others seem to live in relative peace and security. Such questions are futile,



but as Christians who believe in the power of prayer, we can't ignore them.

In response, we pray, we contribute money and we advocate for justice, but what gives me real hope for the suffering poor are the words of the psalmist, “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit” (Ps 34:18).

Though neither we, nor they, may see an end to suffering, Jesus tells us that it's the poor, those who hunger and thirst, mourn and are persecuted that are truly blessed. In giving us the Beatitudes, Jesus was not glorying suffering. He was teaching us that God does not see as we see. What we esteem in this life will pass away, but the more we give of ourselves and our possessions, the more we will receive here and in the next life.

God did not create suffering any more than he created the pandemic. All suffering is a consequence of sin, but to satisfy our every inclination is to live the great lie that tells us that

we are what we possess or what we accomplish. Every time we choose God's will over our will, good over evil, we make a difference.

When we see those who suffer as part of our family and treat them with love rather than disdain, we illumine the night of sin with particles of light. I think of life on Earth as a birthing center for the Kingdom of God on Earth. All the baptized have been entrusted with the light of Christ, and all are called to share it.

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, he commissioned his followers to go forth and baptize all nations. Having endured the cross and grave, he knew how difficult the task before them would be and yet, he sent them forth to be light bearers. Many died as martyrs, singing hymns of praise to God as they went to their death – living proof that even in the midst of suffering, there is joy when Christ lights the way.

Let us pray that we never lose sight of the price that God paid for our redemption, and may we find hope and inspiration in the saints who have gone before us, not only during this Easter season, but every day of our lives.

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

Recognize Holy Spirit as teacher, advocate, intercessor



BELIEVE AS YOU PRAY
MELANIE CODDINGTON

In these final weeks of the Easter season, we hear hopeful whisperings about the coming of the Holy Spirit. In today's Gospel, Jesus begins, “Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.”

This talk of the divine persons dwelling with human beings recalls the voice from the throne in last week's vision from Revelation: “Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them as their God.”

Jesus puts a name (or two or three) to this indwelling presence of God: “I have told you this while I am with you. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have told you.” Though Jesus himself must depart, his disciples will not be left orphan. Indeed, divine help is on the way.

This Holy Spirit, active in the world since the dawn of creation, will now be recognizable as the same Spirit that filled the human person, Jesus. Sent by the Father in the name of Jesus,

this One will bring into the midst of his disciples the enduring presence of the Risen Christ and continue to teach them everything. Hint: The disciples will need to learn as they go.

As Advocate, this One will plead with the Father on behalf of the people: “...the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings. And the one who searches hearts knows what is

the intention of the Spirit, because it intercedes for the holy ones according to God's will” (Rom 8:26-27).

These actions of the Holy Spirit, as teacher, advocate and intercessor energize the spiritual discipline of discernment

— discovering the will of God in all circumstances, especially in complex ones. Jesus knows that situations will arise that will challenge his followers to examine their presumptions and stretch beyond their comfort zones. It doesn't take long.

The reading from Acts recounts one such situation. Though the life and ministry of Jesus clearly revealed the Father's all-embracing mercy, when it comes to incorporating the others (Gentiles) into the Body of Christ, some disciples want to play it safe — by the old rules (“according to the Mosaic practice”).

This adherence-by-default to long-accepted religious norms generates discord: Some insist that Gentile converts be circumcised, essentially becoming Jewish, before they can be saved.

Others, notably Paul and Barnabas, view this as unnecessary for, and indeed contrary to, salvation by grace.

As described in Acts 15:3-21, missing from today's more concise Lectionary version, resolution of the conflict requires pilgrimage to Jerusalem, public debate, compelling testimony, silence, deep listening and reevaluation of tradition.

The Council of Jerusalem begins with intense and extended argument. “After much debate,” Peter reminds those gathered of recent boundary-defying actions of the Holy Spirit that have generated new insights into God's will regarding the Gentiles. Stunned into silence, the assembly listens as Paul and Barnabas tell of signs and wonders worked by God.

Finally, James weighs in, invoking the prophet Amos to show how God's intention to call all humanity into relationship has long been a part of the tradition.

In this process of discernment, the Holy Spirit moves the community (“the apostles and presbyters, in agreement with the whole Church”) to write a letter and send a delegation announcing the outcome: “It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities.”

A handful of prohibitions remain, those deemed essential for mixed communities, including Jewish and Gentile believers, to participate in Eucharist and share life in the Body of Christ.

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

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 15:1-2, 22-29;

Ps 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8;

Rv 21:10-14, 22-23;

Jn 14:23-29

St. Bridget team fares well at FIRST LEGO competition

First-time participants at global event earn Rising All-Stars Award

KRISTEN L. BYRD

Special to The Catholic Virginian

St. Bridget Catholic School's robotics team competed in the FIRST LEGO League World Championship in Houston last month. Throughout the year, 24,000 teams from around the globe competed in St. Bridget's division, with only 108 earning a spot at the championship. Despite it being their first appearance at the competition, St. Bridget's team, "Clueless," earned the Rising All-Stars Award.

The event began April 20 with the unifying Parade of Teams where the FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition in Science and Technology) flag was passed from team to team. Competitors from more than 40 countries attended the World Championship, including the middle schoolers from Richmond.

Clueless raised \$30,000 from St. Bridget School and Church families to pay for hotels, meals and flights for every student and coaches and one chaperone per student.

Competitors had their faith on which to rely.

"I wasn't nervous at all because I knew we might not win, and I was fine with that. I just wanted to represent my school well and have fun," said robot chief coder William McLemore. "I felt supported by my family, school, community and by God. God was someone to turn to when I was stressed or worried something wasn't going to work."

The students had to adhere to strict guidelines and deadlines. They spent countless hours designing, building and programming their robot, followed by time practicing with and perfecting it.

Clueless' robot is named C.H.E.R., which stand for Chic, Helpful, Energetic, Robot. The adaptive robot uses various sensors and complex preprogrammed codes written by the students to navigate a map and complete tasks accurately.

Clueless advanced through every round of competition to arrive at the World Championship, where they not only had to operate their robot, but field questions from judges.

Once competition ended, teams waited as judges deliberated and scored them. Teams were judged on the core values of teamwork,

inclusion, discovery, impact and fun, and robot design.

Since Clueless had no expectations of winning an award, when their name was called for the Rising All-Stars Award, it was a huge surprise.

"When our team was called for the Rising All-Stars award, I was shocked and relieved," said eighth grader Vincent Barrafato, who serves as the team's robot chief lead. "The recognition that we got from this award meant so much to everyone on the team."

"We were thrilled!" echoed coach Eric De Boer. "Six of our 10 team members were brand new to robotics, and this award shows that the judges noticed our team for its accomplishments and expect us to take another step forward in the future."

One thing that set Clueless apart from their competitors was that the team helped pass a law in Virginia based on their "Bus Box" project.

The innovative Bus Box delivers packages to rural and underserved areas by utilizing school buses. Each Bus Box is made of recyclable materials, has 22 square feet of package capacity and can attach to the undercarriage of existing school buses.

Ideally, school bus drivers would be able to deliver packages in between taking children to and from school, which would give them the opportunity to work full-time and earn more money. Companies would also benefit from having increased deliveries and drivers, but fewer delivery vans on the road.

The idea was proposed to Virginia's General Assembly and was later passed by the House and Senate. It was signed into law on April 8, 2022, by Gov. Glenn Youngkin. A resolution was also passed to recognize the team's efforts. State Sen. Siobhan Dunnivant visited St. Bridget and presented a plaque to the team before they left for the World Championship. It is now up to school districts and companies to work out logistics.

When the students weren't competing, they were socializing with people from different countries. Common interests broke through any language barriers. They found a

community there, sharing their thoughts on engineering and learning about each other's robots.

"My favorite part about the trip was the experience our kids had meeting teams from all over the world," said De Boer. "Seeing all these kids interested in solving problems, learning STEM, asking big questions, treating each other with kindness as they competed was incredible."

The whole experience resonated with the entire team.

"I feel like this trip will be one of my fondest memories for my whole life," said McLemore.

The students also benefitted from speaking publicly in front of the judges and other teams, boosting their communication capabilities and confidence. The painstaking work of creating a robot also required responsibility, dedication and perseverance.

"The leadership skills I've received as a team captain will be something I carry with me for the rest of my life," said project lead Langdon Tollett, who will graduate from St. Bridget School this year. He plans to stay involved in the club as a coach.

Clueless looks forward to next season. While there are several students graduating, there has been increased interest from fifth and sixth graders wanting to join the team.

De Boer said that now that the team has experienced the World Championship, they know what to expect and how they need to raise their standards to return.

While he is proud of his team for winning an award, he is prouder of the values they carried with them throughout the competition.

"Yes, it's important for the robot to turn a specific way or for our poster to highlight an idea we had, but it's more important for us to use our gifts in a way that honors and glorifies God," De Boer said. "While the other teams are running around the convention center trying to show the FIRST LEGO League Core Values of inclusion, teamwork, innovation, discovery, fun and impact, we have a higher standard of Jesus to follow. I believe our faith gives our robotics teams an advantage because of our shared values in pursuit of Christ."



Additions blessed at Our Lady of the Valley

Left: Bishop Barry C. Knestout greets attendees at the dedication and blessing of the Our Lady of the Valley Retirement Community chapel, above, and rehabilitation center in Roanoke, Friday, April 29. The chapel and rehabilitation center are part of an \$11.95 million project at the facility. (Photos courtesy of Our Lady of Valley Retirement Community)

Wives of soldiers ask pope to help save their husbands

CINDY WOODEN
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — The young wife of the commander of the Ukrainian battalion still holed up in a steel plant in Mariupol had what she described as a “heart raising” encounter with Pope Francis.

Kateryna Prokopenko, wife of Azov Regiment commander Denys Prokopenko, and Yulya Fedosiuk, wife of Azov soldier Arseniy Fedosiuk, met Pope Francis May 11 at the end of his weekly general audience. Both women are in their 20s.

The women are in almost constant contact with the wives of about 500 of the estimated 2,000 soldiers still believed to be inside the besieged Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol.

“We hope this meeting will give us a chance to save their lives, actually,” Prokopenko told reporters in English after meeting the pope. “Our soldiers are ready to be evacuated to a third country.”

The group of wives includes widows whose husbands’ dead bodies have yet to be recovered and who are pleading for international help so they can give their husbands a Christian burial, Fedosiuk said.

She said they told the pope that an estimated 700 soldiers inside the steel mill are injured; “they have gangrene, amputations; their flesh is rotting.”

As the women were talking to the pope, they said, “he held our hands.”

“He told us he is praying for us, and he is doing everything” he can to push for the complete evacuation of the plant, Fedosiuk said. Denys Prokopenko had announced May 8 that all the civilians who had been sheltering at Azovstal had been evacuated, but later, reports emerged that some civilians still were inside the miles of tunnels under the plants.

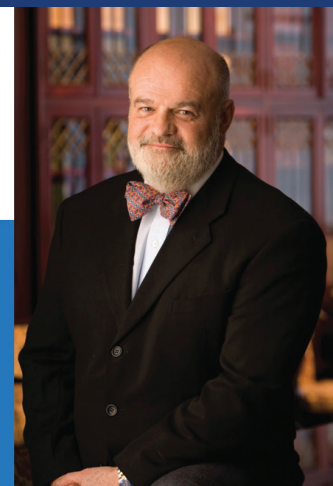
“We asked him to come to Ukraine,” Fedosiuk said, and they asked him “to talk to (Russian President Vladimir) Putin to tell him to let them go.”

Prokopenko said she spoke to her husband the night before meeting the pope. “He told me that he loves me, and I answered that I love him, too, and I say, ‘Just know we’ll do anything to

See Help, Page 16

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Conviction

Continued from Page 6

ing of life in the womb through abortion as well as against the practice of euthanasia for the terminally ill; they must also be bold in denouncing the death penalty, nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction and the exclusion from access to health care, adequate clean water and nutrition, shelter and the basic necessities of life.

Can the Church remain faithful to her mission and not publicly challenge the poor treatment of migrants and refugees? Or confront the persistent manifestations of systemic racism in society? Can the Church be truly proclaiming the Gospel if not calling for mercy and compassion when society can be cold and heartless? Can the Church stand by silently when justice is more readily available to people of means than to the poor? What about when people are abused or treated unfairly, even within the Church's own structures?

When we accept the synodal invitation to listen to all of the people of God, we certainly hear

affirming voices and powerful testimony about the importance of faith and the joyful struggles of those putting that faith into action. We also hear the pained expressions of those who have been hurt or feel excluded by the institutional Church and who challenge the authenticity of our witness based on their experience.

The voices of those who are striving to live their faith with integrity but who face challenges from within and without the Church share their resolve as well as their failures. The voices of those which society considers the least important should encounter the most willing of listeners in the Church. Then as a body and as the leaders within that body, we must proclaim what we have heard without fear of rejection or misunderstanding, but with the conviction of the Gospel's truth.

We must be prepared to "preach the word in season and out of season" (2 Tim 4:2).

Bishop Stowe has headed the Diocese of Lexington, Kentucky, since 2015.

WHAT WE'VE HEARD

Honored: Two Catholic entities were among those honored at the 15th Excellence in Virginia Government Awards on Tuesday, April 26, sponsored by VCU's L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs.

Sacred Heart Center, Richmond, received the Community Enhancement Award for "outstanding commitment to improving the quality of community life in Virginia through an established reputation for exceptional community service."

The school noted the center's educating and helping vaccinate the region's Latino community during COVID. "This lifesaving work helped the Latino vaccination rate grow above 80%, the highest in the Richmond region. Sacred Heart Center is Richmond's premier Latino community center."

All Saints Catholic School, Richmond, received the Grace E. Harris Leadership Award for making "a discernible, sustainable positive impact on the quality of life in Virginia through public service."

All Saints was recognized for "its work to prepare students for profound success in high school, college and throughout their adult lives as engaged leaders."

Good people doing good things I: Salem Knights of Columbus Council 10015 and the Women's Club of Our Lady of Perpetual Help teamed up to provide five Friday fish fries to the community during Lent. Their work resulted in \$3,000, which they donated to the parish toward the purchase of a \$10,000 HVAC unit for the church. This was in addition to the \$2,000 the Knights had already contributed to the cause.

Good people doing good things II: Peninsula Catholic High School held a fundraiser in which it raised \$894.29. The beneficiary of their kindness is St. Michel Parish in Boucan-Carre Haiti, which twins with St. Kateri Tekakwitha, Tabb.

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.



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A Catholic education for grades 8-12

First Responders

Continued from Page 3

The rest is on-the-job training.”

There is no real guidebook, he said; each situation is unique. It's a matter of allowing oneself to be led, of learning to be what those in mourning need. Even if the death has been expected, he said, when it occurs, the family is beset by a sense of loss and in need of consolation.

And, if the death is unexpected, all the more so.

“I have been called out six times in my two years,” he said. “And of those six sudden deaths, two were suicides.”

“The suicides are hard,” he said. “Everyone is in shock. That's when you're needed most. The first thing I do is to find out who's in charge, to find out what's happening, before I proceed. Then I go to the family, talk to them, see where they are at, see what we can do to manage their grief.”

“We don't proselytize, we don't ask if they're Catholic,” he said. “At that moment, it doesn't matter. All that matters is that they know you are there. That they are not alone.”

‘Living Gospel message’

In 2019, Father Daniel Molochko was serving his first weekend as a priest at St. Joseph, Hampton, when a man approached him before Mass and asked him which clergy member owned the car out front with a paramedic sticker.

“I told him it was me,” Father Molochko said.

He explained that he had previously worked as a paramedic with the rescue squads of Virginia Beach, he said, and learned that the man was a battalion chief with the Hampton Fire Department.

“We got to talking, and we realized we had been to paramedic school together 10 years prior,” he said.

During their conversation, the battalion chief asked him if he would consider serving as chaplain.

“So that just serendipitously manifested itself,” Father Molochko said. “I've been riding with them for two years, working with their men and women whenever there's a critical call.”

Today, Father Molochko is parochial vicar of the cluster parishes of Chesapeake and Portsmouth, chaplain of the Hampton Fire Department and chaplain of the volunteer rescue squads of Virginia Beach.

In Virginia Beach, he also serves as a paramedic. In working side by side with first responders, he hopes that they will feel more comfortable in a calling upon him — as someone who understands their experiences — if ever they have need.

He is there to provide spiritual support, he said, however he is able.

“That has taken the form of impromptu catechism and biblical history classes at one of the whiteboards in the kitchen in the fire house, all the way to anointing patients on the way to the hospital when they tell me they are Catholic,” he said.

His experience and his ministry, he said, has bolstered his own faith.

“I don't think anyone can honestly study the intricacies of the human body and the way it's arranged, and the way it works so perfectly, without recognizing the masterwork of some form of Creator. Just in studying medicine alone, it reveals something about the nature of God,” he said.

EMS personnel and their chaplains are living out the Gospel, Father Molochko said, in performing corporal works of mercy — providing relief to the sick and comfort to those who mourn.

“We are providing care and, in a way, dignity, for those people who are possibly having the worst day of their lives,” he said. “It's living a Gospel message in a secular world.”

Teachers

Continued from Page 7

taught science for decades, she worked with students to improve their math and reading skills. When the school's reli-



Laura Hall



Heather Kryz

gion coordinator left to work at another school, Hall offered her help once again by assisting the student lectors and Mass helpers.

After teaching at OLL for many years, Hall converted to Catholicism in 2004, a decision that had a lasting effect on the way she teaches.

“She found it vital to participate spiritually in the community she was so involved in, and thus, she further models faith and discipleship for her students and her colleagues,” said Jacobsen.

Hall works to show her students that science and religion are not at odds, but are one in the same, connected by God.

“I want them to look up at night, see the stars, and know God has created this place we call home. I hope they look around and see those around them, see the beauty of nature, and know God has created this for us,” she said. “Lastly, I want my students to know I love them, and I consider them a gift.”

‘Amazing experience’

Heather Kryz started teaching at a small Catholic school in Detroit in 1999. With minimal supplies but maximum love, she found a home there. When her family moved to Norfolk in 2003 and she started teaching at a public school, she noticed something was missing.

When she later returned to Catholic teaching at St. Gregory the Great School (SGGS), she said “the missing piece was evident from day one of year one. Being part of raising and teaching the next generation of Catholics is an amazing experience.”

Fourteen years later, she is still teaching seventh grade language arts at SGGS, but that's just one of the many hats she wears. She is also the school's religion coordinator and the Student Council Association sponsor. In addition to this, she serves on the Master Curriculum Committee for Language Arts, which will revise the current curriculum to include a list of classroom strategies and resources that reflect

Catholic values.

“Mrs. Kryz' instructional approach focuses not only on diocesan curriculum objectives, but also in promoting a culture that ignites the love of learning while encouraging student initiatives for service to the community,” said Principal Joseph Branco.

While she wants her students to find joy in reading and increase their critical thinking and communication skills, she also wants them to recognize the importance of living their faith.

In literature lessons, Kryz asks students to imagine themselves as a character in the story, and think about how they would act in that situation if guided by their faith and the effect that it would have on the story's outcome.

She also invites her students to give back to the community by helping with the food pantry, participating in toy drives, serving meals and fundraising for the Special Olympics.

“I want students to leave my classroom with knowledge and an ability to communicate well that will serve them in all their endeavors,” she said. “More than that though, I want them to be good stewards of the faith and humanity; to be good humans. I pray that as they grow to become the future of the Church that each student I work with will lead with love and grace.”

A teacher at each school is honored

Administrators and colleagues at each diocesan Catholic school selected one teacher to be recognized at the Wednesday, April 27, ceremony based on their “exceptional commitment to Catholic education through their leadership and service to their students, parents, colleagues, parishes and school communities,” according to criteria established by the Office of Catholic Schools. Those receiving the Excellence in Catholic Education Award are:

- Angela Cash**, All Saints Catholic School
- Miriam Smith**, Blessed Sacrament Huguenot Catholic School
- Nicole Laroussi**, Catholic High School
- Russell Hendrick**, Charlottesville Catholic School
- Sheila McDermott**, Christ the King Catholic School
- Laura Hall**, Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School
- Brittany May**, Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic School
- Melanie Weser**, Peninsula Catholic High School
- Franklin Baker**, Portsmouth Catholic School
- Tim Carlin**, Roanoke Catholic School
- Elizabeth Brown**, Sacred Heart Catholic School
- Patricia Johnson**, St. Anne Catholic School
- Mary Jo Brunner**, St. Benedict Catholic School
- Julia Strukely**, St. Bridget Catholic School
- Vicki Long**, St. Edward-Epiphany Catholic School
- Heather Kryz**, St. Gregory the Great Catholic School
- Caroline Waite**, St. John the Apostle Catholic School
- Arlene Cary**, St. Joseph Catholic School
- Mercy Thompson**, St. Mary Catholic School
- Victoria Sofianek**, St. Mary Star of the Sea Catholic School
- Mary Kay Benish**, St. Matthew's Catholic School
- Bobbie Tasber**, St. Pius X Catholic School
- Lisa Ramsey**, Star of the Sea Catholic School

OPPORTUNITIES

Catholic High School, a college preparatory school serving eastern Hampton Roads, is seeking an accounting business manager to begin this summer. This full-time, 12-month position includes a variety of administrative responsibilities including payroll, school budget, human resources and assurance of compliance with civil law and diocesan policies. The successful candidate has a bachelor's degree in business, accounting or a related field, and demonstrated experience of three to five years in finance and business administration. 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.

St. Ann Catholic Church, a welcoming and growing parish in Ashland, is seeking a full-time minister of Christian formation/pastoral associate. This position is dedicated to enhancing the faith development of each member of the parish community, providing them with programs and services that offer opportunities for growth in their knowledge, love and service of God. Responsibilities include working in close collaboration with the pastor, as well as guiding the coordinators of Christian formation for children and for youth, and serving as a resource to staff, committees and parish groups.

A master's degree and/or equivalent experience required. To apply, please send a cover letter, completed diocesan application and résumé to office@stannsc.org.

St. Joseph Church, Hampton, seeks a part-time music coordinator (25 hours/week); Responsible for the preparation, development, scheduling and presentation of all music for the parish. Job responsibilities include: 1) Coordinate/play music for all weekend and holy day liturgies. 2) Coordinate/play music for funerals, weddings, reconciliation services 3) Direct choir rehearsals 4) Participate in the planning of parish liturgies 5) Attend quarterly liturgy committee meetings 6) Coordinate, train and develop musicians, cantors/song leaders 7) Prepare an annual music budget 8) Participate in diocesan/regional gatherings pertinent to liturgy/music. Applicants should possess a bachelor's degree in music or equivalent education and experience. Prefer a practicing Catholic in good standing, familiar with Catholic liturgy. Salary commensurate with experience. Send cover letter, résumé and application to Paul DeFluri, manager, Peninsula Cluster Parishes, phone: (757) 851-8800, fax: 757-851-1875 or email: pdefluri@gmail.com

The Office of Cemetery and Funeral Services (OCFS) of the Catholic Diocese of Richmond seeks an outreach coordinator/administrative assistant.

This position will serve as the OCFS liaison and advocate for educating families on the Order of Christian Funerals, OCFS mission programs, products and services, and the benefits of advanced planning. The outreach coordinator/administrative assistant will be stationed at the OCFS office located in Williamsburg, and will serve as the first person a family member will see or talk to. They are responsible for making a good first impression when greeting walk-in or answering inbound calls and demonstrating by example OCFS' core values in all their dealings with families, staff and internal/external candidates.

The successful candidate will answer telephone calls and forward or relay messages to staff in a timely manner; communicate clearly and effectively with families, guests, staff and others; build relationships with staff from OCFS locations, the diocese, priests, parish staff and local community leaders and organizations; coordinate with OCFS marketing to prepare parish, marketing and mail house deliverables; publish a monthly schedule for parish outreach (and community) events; and perform other tasks and duties as assigned. Some nights and weekends will be required.

Qualifications: College degree preferred, and/or one to three years of direct experience presenting to the public, working with public organizers and providing customer service; should have knowledge of the rituals and traditions with regards to the Catholic faith; one to three years serving in parish, pastoral or Catholic ministry positions a plus; ability to conduct oneself with a "Family First" approach; proficiency in MS Office; ability to plan and coordinate medium to large size outreach and community events; excellent interpersonal communication and organizational skills; strong time management skills and ability to meet tight deadlines. Bilingual preferred. Valid state-issued driver's license, good driving record and proof of auto liability insurance is required. Interested candidates should please send a cover letter, résumé and diocesan application (<https://bit.ly/36ndEsX>) to Kelly Shumate, HR coordinator, at jobs@richmonddiocese.org. To learn more about the Catholic Diocese of Richmond visit www.richmonddiocese.org.

St. Augustine Church, North Chesterfield, is seeking a full-time, 35 hours a week, coordinator of facilities maintenance. Basic duties include working trades people who are members of the parish as well as contractors to assure the proper maintenance of the facility

— church, offices and rectory. Applicants should be capable of performing some basic maintenance and be willing to work with largely Hispanic volunteer base. Interested candidates please email Caroline Honings with a diocesan application (<https://bit.ly/36ndEsX>) to chonings@staugustinerva.org.

St. Gabriel Catholic Church is seeking to hire a part-time music coordinator (25 hours/week) to facilitate and plan the music for all liturgies. The ideal candidate must possess a solid understanding of Catholic liturgy, knowledge of liturgical music in a variety of styles, leadership skills to enable vocal training with the cantors, and the ability to work in cooperation with and under the direction of the pastor. Keyboard or guitar proficiency is preferred. The ability to play the keyboard, piano and/or guitar is a plus. A degree in music is preferred but not required. In addition to coordination of the cantors, musicians and choirs, this position will help coordinate holy day, wedding, funeral and other special occasion music. Strong computer skills a must. Must be a Roman Catholic in good standing. Salary is in accordance with diocesan scale. Education and/or Certification: Degree in music performances and composition or equivalent education is preferred. Experience: Three to five years' liturgical music experience. Strong knowledge and appreciation of Catholic liturgy. To apply: Please send a résumé and diocesan application to: Therese Venti, 8901 Winterpock Road, Chesterfield, VA 23832; fax 804-639-6591 or therese.venti@saintgabriel.org.

St. Gabriel Catholic Church is seeking applicants for the position of children's formation coordinator.

This position is responsible for overseeing the faith formation program for pre-school through grade five, children's preparation for first reconciliation, first Eucharist and Vacation Bible School. Qualifications: Candidate must be a practicing Catholic in good standing. Possess an undergraduate degree in theology, ministry, religious education or equivalent. Excellent people skills, outstanding computer skills and the ability to maintain confidentiality. This is a 25-hour-per-week, part-time position with regular weekend events and occasional evening meetings. Office days are Tuesday through Friday. To apply: Please send a résumé and diocesan application to Therese Venti, 8901 Winterpock Road, Chesterfield, VA 23832; fax 804-639-6591 or therese.venti@saintgabriel.org.

SHORTTAKES

Resurrection Catholic Church 15353 Moneta Road, Moneta, invites you to join their Joyous Junque sale Friday and Saturday, June 3 and 4, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sale items include: furniture, lamps, artwork, lawn and garden supplies, watercrafts and water sports equipment, lawn equipment, fishing gear and bicycles. Visit our website for more information: <http://www.joyousjunque.org>.

Mass with charismatic expression, first Wednesday of the month, 7 p.m.; adoration with healing prayer, second Sunday of the month, 5 p.m. St. Clare of Assisi Retreat Center, 620 Buckroe Ave., Hampton. Connect with us at: contact@awakeningthedomesticchurch.com or 757-814-1706.

Pope: God 'does not disown his children'

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Pope Francis said he wants LGBT Catholics to know that God is a father who "does not disown any of his children."

The pope's comment was among the short answers to three questions posed in a letter by Jesuit Father James Martin, editor at large of America magazine and a driving force behind its new website, outreach.faith, which provides news and resources for LGBT Catholics, their families and the people who minister with them.

Pope Francis' letter, in Spanish, is dated May 8. It was posted on Outreach the next day, and Vatican Media also published a translation in Italian.

Father Martin asked the pope, "What do you say to an LGBT Catholic who has experienced rejection from the Church?"

"I would have them recognize it not as the 'rejection of the Church,' but instead 'of people in the Church,'" the pope responded.

"The Church is mother and calls

together all of her children," he continued. "Take for example the parable of those invited to the feast: 'the just, the sinners, the rich and the poor, etc.'"

A Church that is "selective," or makes some pretext about who is "pure," he said, "is not the Holy Mother Church, but rather a sect."

Asked what the most important thing LGBT people should know about God, Pope Francis responded, "God is Father, and he does not disown any of his children. And 'the style' of God is 'closeness, mercy and tenderness.' Along this path you will find God."

Father Martin also asked the pope what he would like LGBT people to know about the Church, to which the pope responded that they should read the Acts of the Apostles. "There they will find the image of the living Church."

Editor's note: The pope's letter in Spanish and an English translation can be found at <https://bit.ly/PopeLGBTMessage>.

“En esta hora la humanidad, agotada y angustiada, está bajo la cruz contigo”

Esta tarde el Papa Francisco hará el acto de consagración al Inmaculado Corazón de María de Rusia y Ucrania, que llevan un mes en guerra. Un gesto que tendrá lugar en la Basílica del Vaticano y también en Fátima, donde Francisco ha enviado al cardenal Konrad Krajewski. “La paz nace siempre de Dios y, por tanto, conformándose con el corazón de Aquella que lo ama inmensamente”: así lo dijo el padre Cecchin, presidente de la Pontificia Academia Mariana Internacional

FABIO COLAGRANDE Y BENEDETTA CAPELLI - CIUDAD DEL VATICANO

Como los niños se dirigen a su Madre, así la humanidad se encomienda a María, Reina de la Paz, en medio de la tempestad, de una guerra desatada hace un mes entre Rusia y Ucrania. “A ti, pues, te consagramos el futuro de toda la familia humana, las necesidades y las aspiraciones de los pueblos, las angustias y las esperanzas del mundo. Que a través de ti la divina Misericordia se derrame sobre la tierra, y el dulce latido de la paz vuelva a marcar nuestras jornadas”. Las palabras del Acto de Consagración al Inmaculado Corazón de María de Rusia y Ucrania resonarán hoy a las 17 horas, en la Basílica de San Pedro, cuando el Papa presida el Rito de la Reconciliación con confesión y absolución individual. El mismo Acto de Consagración será realizado en este día por todos los obispos del mundo. En Fátima lo hará el cardenal Konrad Krajewski, limosnero papal, enviado por Francisco.

Configurarse al corazón de María

La decisión del Papa Francisco de consagrar a Rusia, Ucrania y a toda la humanidad al Inmaculado Corazón de María se inscribe en la tradición del Magisterio de la Iglesia, que siempre ha mirado a la Virgen como aquella a la que encomendarse en los momentos de prueba. En una entrevista concedida a Radio Vaticano - Vatican News, el mariólogo padre Stefano Cecchin ofm, presidente de la Pontificia Academia Mariana Internacional, subrayó el significado teológico de esta consagración: “Para encontrar la paz debemos configurarnos al corazón de María, un corazón que ama inmensamente”. En octubre de 2020, al encontrarse con los profesores y estudiantes de la Pontificia Facultad de Teología “Marianum” de Roma, el Papa les había invitado a permanecer “siempre atentos a los signos de los tiempos marianos que recorren nuestra época”. Según el padre Cecchin, la decisión de Francisco de renovar este acto de consagración en este momento histórico nace precisamente de esta atención: “Cuando hay guerras en una familia, uno se encomienda a la Madre”.

Partió hacia Fátima, donde se celebra una conferencia sobre la consagración de Portugal a la Inmaculada Concepción, que tuvo lugar en 1931. Fue la primera nación del mundo consagrada al Corazón Inmaculado de María. Al preparar mi informe, recorrí todo el camino de la Iglesia en la “Tierra de María”, como se llama el país portugués. Me di cuenta de cómo esta presencia, en todos los momentos difíciles de la historia de Portugal, alcanzó su punto culminante en las apariciones de Fátima. Y fue precisamente Fátima la que nos dio la imagen de María preocupada por la situación de Europa en ese momento. Estábamos en 1917, estaba la revolución rusa, la primera guerra mundial, y Dios siguió cuidando de nosotros a través de María, que en las apariciones de Fátima pidió la consagración de Rusia. Quiero decir



El papa Francisco inciensa mientras venera una estatua de Nuestra Señora de Fátima en el Santuario de Nuestra Señora de Fátima en Portugal, el 13 de mayo de 2017. El papa ha invitado a “todas las comunidades y a todos los creyentes” a unirse a él para consagrar y confiar Rusia y Ucrania a María el 25 de marzo de 2022. (Foto de CNS/Paul Haring)

que, si buscamos con atención los “signos de los tiempos marianos”, como nos ha invitado a hacer el Papa Francisco, los encontraremos también en el momento histórico actual. Por eso me pareció realmente maravillosa la decisión del Papa de renovar esta consagración y confiar así a la “Madre” las dos naciones en guerra, Rusia y Ucrania. El Papa Francisco nos sigue diciendo que la casa común es mujer, y es como María, que la Iglesia es como María y es Madre. Sabemos muy bien que en una familia cuando los hijos no se llevan bien y hay problemas, la madre es la que suele poner paz. Este acto de encomienda es fruto de la intuición del Papa y se lo agradecemos mucho.

¿Cuál es el significado teológico de esta consagración?

El Corazón de María es el corazón de Dios. Debemos pensar que María es la que compartió con el Padre el único Hijo. Ese Hijo amado inmensamente por el Padre y la Madre, como nos han recordado Juan Pablo II y Pablo VI y toda la tradición. María nos abrió el camino para amar, que correspondió, más que ninguna otra criatura, al inmenso amor de Dios. Así que todos estamos llamados a configurarnos a este Corazón para poder amar a Jesús en los demás. Estamos convencidos de que la verdadera paz no viene de las Naciones Unidas, de las armas o de la política de los Estados, sino sólo de Dios. Por lo tanto, si queremos crear la paz, debemos conformar nuestros corazones a la que amó a Dios y que ama a la Iglesia y a nuestros hermanos, es decir, a María. Por tanto, éste es el Corazón inmaculado de María: un corazón que ama inmensamente, donándose a todos nosotros. Por lo tanto, si realmente queremos crear la paz, debemos partir de nuestros corazones conformados al Corazón Inmaculado de María.

El Papa Francisco ha invitado a los obispos del mundo y a sus sacerdotes a unirse a él en este acto de consagración y encomienda. ¿Por qué?

Me parece una opción ligada al concepto

de sinodalidad que el Papa Francisco no deja de reiterar. El Papa representa la Iglesia, el sentido de la unidad, pero unidad con la Iglesia y en la Iglesia, que es -como él la llama- nuestra casa común. Así que no nos salvamos solos, como nos recordó el Papa Francisco en Fratelli tutti, y siempre juntos debemos pedir a Dios la salvación del mundo. “Donde estén dos o tres reunidos en mi nombre, yo estaré en medio de ellos”, nos recuerda el Evangelio, y Francisco subraya que el camino para salvar el mundo debemos hacerlo juntos, no solos. Por eso en este momento toda la Iglesia debe estar unida, como en un gran Sínodo, un gran Concilio, en el que se pide la intervención de Dios.

La historia de la Iglesia nos dice que se han realizado varios actos de consagración al Inmaculado Corazón de María, llevados a cabo por los predecesores del Papa Francisco: Pío XII, Pablo VI y Juan Pablo II. ¿Cómo situar la elección del Papa en el contexto de esta tradición?

Para nosotros es muy importante que el Magisterio de la Iglesia siempre, a lo largo de la historia, haya mirado a María como aquella que es imagen de la unidad de la Iglesia, que cuida de la Iglesia, a la que, en los momentos difíciles, debemos invocar siempre para que nos ayude a encontrar una solución. El icono mariano más bello, para mí, es el de María que nos muestra el camino: Nuestra Señora Odigitria, la Virgen que nos muestra el camino hacia Jesús. La Iglesia, con su Sabiduría iluminada por el Espíritu Santo, sigue reiterando así, como lo hizo también el Vaticano II, que María es un signo de esperanza segura. Recordemos que, en la historia de la Iglesia, en los momentos más difíciles siempre se ha invocado el nombre de María, como nos recuerda el magisterio pontificio. Así que el Papa Francisco está en continuidad con la enseñanza de la Iglesia.

¿Por qué quiso el Papa que uno de sus enviados, el cardenal Krajewski, hiciera el mismo gesto en el Santuario de Fátima?

Las apariciones de Fátima deben ser contextualizadas en el camino realizado por Portugal. En el siglo XVII, el rey de Portugal fue el primero en consagrarse a la Inmaculada Concepción, llegando a quitarse la corona y colocarla sobre la cabeza de la Inmaculada. Desde entonces, los reyes de Portugal nunca han llevado la corona, dejando este privilegio a la Inmaculada Concepción. Se trata, pues, de una tierra en la que María siempre ha mostrado su cuidado y ayuda en los momentos más difíciles. Fátima se convierte, pues, en la cúspide de esta manifestación, que luego superó los límites de Portugal para convertirse en una realidad, por tanto, en una aparición, que se aplica a todo el mundo. Así que no se trata sólo de confiar Rusia y Ucrania al corazón de María, sino todo lo que es injusticia, lo que va contra el derecho de la persona humana, lo que es un comportamiento mafioso. Todas estas realidades queremos transformarlas juntos a través de María para hacer un mundo mejor.

Desde el escritorio de Daniel Villar

Aunque el día de la consagración fue el 25 de marzo, durante este mes de María, recordemos siempre de tener en mente a nuestros hermanos y hermanas de Ucrania y Rusia y de seguir consagrando ambos países al Inmaculado Corazón de María en oración.

Central VA cluster celebrates diversity

More than 200 parishioners of Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM), Blackstone; Sacred Heart, Meherrin; and St. Theresa, Farmville – the Central Virginia Catholic Cluster – celebrated their diversity at an inaugural international dinner hosted by the cluster's Life Ministries Committee on Divine Mercy Sunday, April 24. The dinner was held in St. Theresa's new parish center.

"We come closer to understanding God's heart when we encounter the Other: people of good faith from a variety of cultures, of differing abilities, in a range of life stages," said committee co-chair Heather Edwards.

Homemade dishes representing the traditions of parishioners provided sustenance; guests enjoyed foods native to the Philippines, Guatemala, Italy, Spain, France and Nigeria – parish administrator Father Tochi Iwuji's home

country. Music was provided by the IHM Spanish Mass choir and Father Paul Lagco, parochial vicar.

The dinner also served as an opportunity to raise money to benefit the family of Joshua Bolt, a member of St. Theresa seeking a wheelchair-accessible van.

The successful international dinner has led to plans for further cluster-wide events.

The Life Ministries Committee was a vision of Father Iwuji and facilitates an active approach to the Church's pro-life mission. The committee works with the Farmville Pregnancy Center, tends a community garden at St. Theresa to provide fresh vegetables for the parish food bank, and connects home-bound parishioners with a card ministry that celebrates birthdays and wedding anniversaries each month.

Flag-flying victory for Boston's Christians

CAROL ZIMMERMANN
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — After the Supreme Court ruled that Boston violated the free speech rights of a Christian group to fly its flag at City Hall, another group, The Satanic Temple, has requested permission to fly a flag outside the city building.

The mayor's office of the Boston has not commented on the group's request except to say that it has been reviewing the court's decision and also evaluating its flag-raising program.

On May 2, the Supreme Court handed down a unanimous decision in favor of the city flying the flag of a Christian group. It said the city couldn't deny the group the right to raise its flag along with other flags reflecting the city's diversity.

"Boston's flag-raising program does not express government speech," wrote Justice Stephen Breyer in the court's opinion. "As a result, the city's refusal to let (the group) fly their flag based on its religious viewpoint violated the Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment."

"This case is so much more significant than a flag," said Mathew Staver, founder and chairman of Liberty Counsel, a Christian legal group that represented Camp Constitution that owns the flag in question.

"Boston openly discriminated against viewpoints it disfavored when it opened the flagpoles to all applicants and then excluded Christian viewpoints," he added in a statement.

During oral arguments in January, the justices seemed to indicate their support for the group excluded from flying their flag with an image of a cross on it.

The group had been told in 2017 by city officials that it would not be able to fly its flag on a

flagpole reserved for different groups because of concerns that its cross could be viewed as a government endorsement of a particular religion.

The group sued the city, noting that in the 12 years of different flags flying from this pole, this was the first one that had been denied. However, the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the 1st Circuit, based in Boston, ruled that the city's control of the flagpole program made it government speech.

The Supreme Court justices narrowed in on whether the city's third flagpole was essentially a public forum that deserved free speech protections or if it was just a means for government speech.

Justice Elena Kagan, skeptical the flag in question could violate the First Amendment's Establishment Clause, said: "In the context of a system where flags go up, flags go down, different people have different kinds of flags, then it is a violation of the free speech part of the First Amendment and not an Establishment Clause violation."

Justice Brett Kavanaugh similarly said the flag dispute could not be viewed as a violation of the Establishment Clause, noting that "equal treatment of religious and nonreligious groups isn't a violation." The clause prohibits the government from endorsing religion and from favoring one religion over another.

Boston city officials argued that requiring the third pole to be open to everyone — the other two poles are for the U.S. and state flags — could force the city to put up flags that might promote division or intolerance. With that uncertainty, the city stopped applications for the flag-raising program while the case was argued in court.

An evacuation to a third country is essential, Prokopenko said. None of the soldiers will surrender to Russian troops and face the likelihood of being shot, tortured or taken to "a concentration camp in Russia."

What is needed, she said, is "a strong diplomatic coalition that will push Putin to let them go" to a third country.

They said they will follow their husbands to a third country, if possible, "and then we hope to go to Kyiv, of course, because it is our country," Prokopenko said. "We don't want to be refugees; we just want to live in our country, build our country."

CNS

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Greg Erlandson, director and editor-in-chief of Catholic News Service, said he was "profoundly saddened by this decision."

"For more than a century, Catholic News Service has served the local, national and international Catholic press. I am proud of the professionalism of our staff of editors, journalists and photographers and of all that they have accomplished."

Staff reductions will also be taking place in public affairs, creative services and marketing and episcopal resources.

A total of 21 employees will be laid off. Catholic News Service was founded in 1920. In a meeting with Rome bureau staff in 2021, Pope Francis told them that "over these past hundred years, Catholic News Service has provided an invaluable contribution to the English-speaking world through its coverage of the church's mission of proclaiming the Gospel and witnessing to the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ."

The news service currently serves a majority of U.S. dioceses as well as national and international media operations.

USCCB Publishing, which holds the rights to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the U.S. Adult Catechism and many other books, will cease its publishing operations at the end of 2022.

Editor's note: The Diocese of Richmond's Office of Communications, including The Catholic Virginian, and other diocesan communications offices and publications are exploring other sources for Catholic news and information. Updates on this process will be published in The Catholic Virginian and www.catholicvirginian.org.

Pope

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being, with whom it is always worth seeking dialogue for the solution of problems," the archbishop told Fides, news agency of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

While Cardinal Parolin said the Kremlin had not responded to Pope Francis' message, the Russian Orthodox Church did take exception to the pope's interview with Corriere della Sera in which the pope said Patriarch Kirill of Moscow should not "turn himself into Putin's altar boy."

The pope had said that when he spoke to the patriarch on Zoom in mid-March, "He spent the first 20 minutes holding a piece of paper reading all the reasons for the war."

"I listened to him, and I told him, 'I don't know anything about this. Brother, we are not clerics of the state, we cannot use the language of politics, but of Jesus. We are shepherds of the same holy people of God. That is why we must seek the path of peace, to cease the blast of weapons,'" he said.

Commenting on the interview as a whole, the Moscow Patriarchate said, "Pope Francis chose an incorrect tone to convey the content of this conversation" with the patriarch. "Such statements are unlikely to contribute to the establishment of a constructive dialogue between the Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox churches, which is especially necessary at the present time."

Help

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save you."

"We will do anything to save them all in the Azovstal plant," she said.

Food, water and medical supplies inside the plant are scarce, she said, and a Russian bomb destroyed the medical clinic, killing many soldiers and hastening the death of others.

Fedosiuk told reporters, "My husband wrote to me two days ago and he asked me to find an article about how to live without water as long as it is possible."