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Why pope's reminders of Russia's war are needed

JUNNO AROCHO ESTEVES
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Since the beginning of Russia's war on Ukraine, Pope Francis has consistently expressed his closeness to the people of the country and reminded Christians on an almost weekly basis to not grow indifferent to the tragedy of war.

During a July 14 meeting with members of several religious congregations, the pope warned that among "the greatest dangers now" was the world slowly turning its gaze away from the conflict.

"A few days ago, I saw in the newspaper that the news about the war was on Page 9!" the pope said. "This is no longer a problem that is of interest; this is awful."

For Andrii Yurash, Ukraine's

ambassador to the Holy See, Pope Francis' consistent reminder of "the barbarism of war" is needed because "four months of war has made a lot of people around the world accustomed to this situation."

"I have not seen any speeches by the Holy Father dedicated to the problems of the world in which Ukraine was not mentioned," Yurash told Catholic News Service July 18.

It is "inspiring that the Holy

"Russia is doing everything possible to prolong the war and make it painful not just for Ukraine, but for the whole world."

— Ambassador Andrii Yurash

the Holy See in December, Yurash's move to Rome came much sooner than he had expected.

"For me personally, it will always be memorable that I received my Italian diplomatic visas on the first day of the war" in February, he recalled. Still in Kyiv, "I went to the Italian embassy; it was a very

Father understands and is not exhausted repeating again and again the importance of instilling peace" and calling for an end to the war, he said.

Appointed as Ukraine's ambassador to

difficult, very hard atmosphere. I saw the beginning of the evacuation of the embassy. But in the first minutes after opening, I received my and my family's passports from the Italian embassy."

But like many Ukrainians, the ambassador knows the pain of having to leave behind a loved one. His oldest son, who also serves as a member of Ukraine's parliament, "decided to be a regular soldier and to defend the country."

Since coming to Rome, Yurash said, he has been moved by the concern of many, including Pope Francis, who asked about his son.

"When I presented my credentials, the Holy Father asked me about the personal consequences of the war, and I told him about

See War, Page 2

Celebrating 150 years of service



Comboni Missionary Sisters and guests celebrate the religious community's 150th anniversary, Saturday, July 9, at Our Lady of Lourdes, Richmond. From left: Sisters Tiberh Hagos and Maria Jose Silva, Mona Bolaños, and Sisters Cecelia Sierra and Saba Haile. See story, Page 3. (Photo/Sue Berinato)

Bishops call House bill to codify Roe 'extreme'

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The chairmen of two U.S. bishops' committees said a measure passed by the House July 15 is "the most unjust and extreme abortion on demand bill our nation has ever seen."

They implored lawmakers "who see abortion as a legitimate 'solution' to the needs of women to abandon this path of death and despair," urging them to join the U.S. bishops in prioritizing "the well-being of women, children and families" by providing material resources and "personal accompaniment" so "no woman ever feels forced to choose between her future and the life of her child."

Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, and Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York, chairman of the USCCB's Committee for Religious Liberty, made the comments in a joint statement July 18.

'Failure to serve women'

The bill, H.R. 8296, would impose abortion on demand nationwide at any stage of pregnancy and would eliminate pro-life laws at every level of government — including parental notification for minor girls, informed consent, and health and safety protections specific to abortion facilities.

"Answering the needs of women by promoting taxpayer-funded elective abortion, as this bill would do, is a grave evil and a failure to love and serve women," said Archbishop

See 'Extreme,' Page 2

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Inside This Edition

CCC continues to walk with women, children in need
Page 6

Seven ways to get teens excited about Mass
Page 7

'Doing what the Church is teaching'
Page 12

'Taste of St. Anne's'



Ken and Sarah Uy and their children serve lumpia, vegetable fried rice and fortune cookies during the first 'Taste of St. Anne's,' Sunday, June 26, at the Ashland parish. The event, organized by the Knights of Columbus, featured food from 13 countries, reflecting the diverse ethnic backgrounds of parishioners. (Photo/Daphne Wood-Lasser)

War

Continued from Page 1

my son," he told CNS. "And later, I had another opportunity to see the Holy Father, and I was absolutely surprised, he asked me, 'How is your son?'"

"I didn't expect the Holy Father to remember so many details," he added. "He assured me, like many other people here in the Vatican, that he is praying for me. And I really hope and believe that prayer will help (my son) survive."

Yurash told CNS that Ukrainian authorities are grateful for the pope's willingness to visit Kyiv. However, while the possibility of a papal trip seems more and more likely, no date had been set as of mid-July.

The only thing "we know for now is that its after Canada," where the pope will be July 24-29.

The pope, he said, "is waiting for the time when his impact will be of most use, when his impact will be most visible. But I think we are already in this time."

However, Yurash said he doubts Pope Francis will be able to fulfill his hope of visiting Moscow to plead for an end to the war.

Russian President Vladimir Putin "perfectly understands" what the pope's main message should be, the ambassador said. "It will be demanding; it will be very concrete, emphasizing that Russia is responsible for the war and has to do everything to stop the war. (Putin) will not be willing to answer positively. So, in this case, negotiations would not be successful for either side," he told CNS.

The war, he added, also has strained relations between the Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church, which he said is more aligned with the "interests of the Rus-

sian state."

Yurash told CNS that he noticed "real changes in the perception of the Russian Orthodox Church by many, many people in the Holy See" who have "started to understand the real aims of Russian Orthodox policy toward the Catholic Church" and the Vatican.

"In my private, everyday communications with many figures related to the Holy See, I can see the same approach, and they are confirming that they are shocked by the position of the Russian Church in this conflict," he said.

Nevertheless, despite the complex relationship between the Vatican and Russia, Yurash said he hopes the Vatican will have a special place as a mediator if negotiations were to begin between Ukraine and Russia.

However, while there is still some hope, "it is very difficult to say at the moment" when negotiations would take place because "Russia is doing everything possible to prolong the war and make it painful not just for Ukraine, but for the whole world."

Ukraine must "be strong and we need to be equal in this negotiation," he said. "I think everybody in the West realizes that a much stronger Ukraine " will be in a better position to negotiate with Russia.

"Russia discovered that it is not so strong as (it thought it was) before the war" and that its strength "is just a myth and nothing more; without real power, without real support," Yurash said.

"I really believe that not only Ukrainians in Ukraine, but also the rest of the world found out and saw the real face of the Russian totalitarian regime," he said.

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'Extreme'

Continued from Page 1

Lori and Cardinal Dolan.

"Simply repeating the mantra that abortion is health care doesn't make it so," they added. "Deliberately ending the lives of defenseless and voiceless human beings is the antithesis of health care."

They said H.R. 8296 would likely force health care providers and professionals to perform, assist in and/or refer for abortion against their deeply-held beliefs, as well as force employers and insurers to cover or pay for abortion.

Respect for mother, child

Archbishop Lori and Cardinal Dolan invited everyone, in Congress and in the country at large, to join the U.S. bishops "in pursuing a vision we presented in 'Standing with Moms in Need,'" which, they said, "upholds the truth that every human life is sacred and inviolable — a society in which the legal protection of human life is accompanied by profound care for mothers and their children."

The USCCB issued the statement "Standing with Moms in Need" earlier this year as the nation awaited the outcome of the Supreme Court's ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, a challenge to a Mississippi law banning abortion after 15 weeks. Oral arguments were heard in the case Dec. 1.

On June 24, the court upheld the Mississippi law 6-3, but the high court also voted 5-4 to overturn its 1973 *Roe* decision and

1992's *Casey v. Planned Parenthood* ruling, which affirmed *Roe*.

In the "Standing with Moms in Need" statement, the bishops pledged "to redouble our efforts to accompany women and couples who are facing unexpected or difficult pregnancies, and during the early years of parenthood, offering them loving and compassionate care through initiatives such as 'Walking with Moms in Need' and countless others."

'Proclaim God's mercy'

In 2020, the U.S. bishops launched the initiative "Walking with Moms in Need," which aims to engage every Catholic parish "in providing a safety net to ensure that pregnant and parenting moms have the resources, love and support they need to nurture the lives of their children."

In the "Standing with Moms in Need" statement, the bishops also said they would redouble "our advocacy for laws that ensure the right to life for unborn children and that no mother or family lacks the basic resources needed to care for their children, regardless of race, age, immigration status or any other factor."

"We are deeply conscious that, after nearly half a century of legalized abortion, more than 65 million children have died from abortion and an untold number of women, men, and families suffer in the aftermath," they also said.

Editor's note: The full "Standing with Moms in Need" statement can be found online on the USCCB website at <https://bit.ly/3yOkpyt>.

CV earns 3 awards

The Catholic Media Association honored The Catholic Virginian with three awards for its editorial work during a ceremony Thursday, July 7, at the association's conference in Portland, Oregon.

Janna Reynolds earned first place for best personality profile at a non-weekly publication with fewer than six staff members for "Popes' preacher subject of local producers' film," which appeared in the Nov. 24, 2021, issue (bit.ly/PopesPreacher).

Judges praised the story about Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa, a Capuchin friar, for "extensive use of wide-ranging interview quotes" that "made this article stand out in defining the personality explored and particularly the difference he has and is in making in the world today."

For the second consecutive year, the paper, in a combined effort with the Office of Commu-

nications and the Finance Office, received first place for best annual report — (Arch)diocesan finances, which also appeared in the Nov. 24, 2021, issue.

Judges stated, "This was a great 'Goldilocks' annual report where everything was balanced well. There was just the right mix of text, images, facts, figures, anecdotes and quotes. The numbers were available for those interested in digging deeper into the budget, but the information provided was not overwhelming. The images ranged in tone from playful to solemn with everything in between — symbolizing the many different highs and lows of the year."

Wendy Klesch, a Catholic Virginian correspondent in the Eastern Vicariate, received an honorable mention for "CHS students getting hands-on engineering experience" in the Jan. 26, 2021, issue (bit.ly/CHSEngineering).



CHRIST OUR HOPE
MOST REV. BARRY C. KNESTOUT

Bishop Knestout's column is scheduled to return in September.

Comboni Sisters celebrate 150th anniversary

Missionary outreach makes impact in Richmond, throughout the world

KRISTEN L. BYRD

Special to The Catholic Virginian

By the mid-19th century, the words of Jesus had reached many corners of the globe, but Africa remained largely untouched by Christianity. That changed in 1864, when Father Daniel Comboni journeyed to Africa to bring God's light to those who many dismissed as unworthy. He devoted his life to evangelizing, educating and advocating for the Africans whom he served, founding the Comboni Missionaries in 1867 and Comboni Missionary Sisters (CMS) in 1872.

What started as the project of one man has grown into a global movement, with thousands of missionaries serving in dozens of countries across the world, including the United States. A Mass marking CMS' 150th jubilee was celebrated by Bishop Barry C. Knestout on Saturday, July 9, at Our Lady of Lourdes, Richmond, where CMS has been present since their arrival to the Diocese of Richmond in the 1950s.

Father Comboni was born in 1831 in Limone, Italy. He was canonized a saint in 2003. According to CMS' website, he was always drawn to the poorest of the poor, the most abandoned, the forgotten. His motto was "Save Africa with Africa" by teaching communities to be self-sufficient. This was a revolutionary concept, but one that proved successful as thousands converted to Catholicism and villages began to flourish.

While the slave trade was still tearing Africa apart, the priest helped free those in bondage, striving to break the chains on the body and soul of the person by offering food and faith as sustenance. He also provided water, medicine, training, churches, clinics and schools. In turn, those he helped went on to help others. The first Sudanese Comboni missionaries were former slaves whom Father Comboni helped unshackle.

Sister Delia Margarita Contre-ras del Toro spoke of the deep love Father Comboni had for the African people.

"They were neglected, exploited, taken as slaves, and the natural resources of their continent sacked. Not being recognized as human beings, it was thought that they did not have a soul and did not need to be evangelized," she said. "But Comboni was able to see African people as human beings, with the same dignity as everyone else, and needed to be respected, be treated accordingly, and they had the right to hear the good news of Jesus Christ."

Father Comboni also empowered women by putting his complete trust in the nuns who carried



Bishop Barry C. Knestout celebrates Mass marking the 150th anniversary of the Comboni Missionary Sisters, Saturday, July 9, at Our Lady of Lourdes, Richmond. Concelebrating with the bishop is Father Jonathan Goertz, right, pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes. Assisting is Deacon Frank Nelson. (Photo/Sue Berinato)

out his charisms, which included sharing the Gospel, developing leadership and linking evangelization with a commitment to peace and justice. The women dedicated themselves to the tenets of Father Comboni, working tirelessly to give voice to the voiceless and transform the impoverished lives around them.

Sister Delia Margarita explained the importance of self-sacrifice, saying that "laying down one's life for a friend" is a "sign of love to Jesus Christ and to people, and in doing so, the fulfillment of one's own vocation as a missionary."

'Held together by God'

CMS' work is not without risk. Due to pervasive political unrest and war throughout Africa, dozens of CMS nuns have been kidnapped, beaten and killed over the past 150 years.

Sister Maria Cecilia Sierra Salcido recounted, "One year after the death of our Founder (in 1882), eight of our sisters were kidnapped by Islamic extremists. As a result, all the missions in Sudan were destroyed; three sisters died in captivity, and five survived. In 1964, all the Comboni Missionaries were expelled from Sudan and other African countries. In countries such as Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, former Zaire, and Mozambique, rebel groups looted our missions; some sisters were kidnapped, others were injured or traumatized, and two were killed."

Despite the dangers they faced daily, the sisters returned to their work in Africa and continue to pledge their lives to the people they serve.

Sister Maria Cecilia noted why they continue to walk the "dark valleys."

"God always searched and brought us back, holding us together, personally and collectively. God's goodness and kindness continue to astonish us," she said. "There is

a sense of immense gratitude as, after 150 years, we are still here, grounded, grateful and with a sense of mission."

In addition to the multitude of converts, CMS also established the first Catholic radio station in Sudan and later contributed to a community television station, which helped amplify Father Comboni's message. While the number of Catholics is dwindling in some European countries, it continues to increase in African nations.

The continent remains pivotal to CMS' mission, as there is a constant need for help but also a continuous sense of hope.

"There are still situations of oppression that hinder the growth and development of people from having equal rights and living with dignity," said Sister Adriana Tovar, USA delegation leader of CMS, but there are also many people and Christian communities which are ready to share the harvest and the richness of the Gospels that has been planted in their heart."

Ministry to refugees

As part of CMS' mission in this country, Richmond is the headquarters of Comboni Missionary Sisters in the USA. The city was deeply segregated when CMS arrived. When they opened the Holy Angels Nursery in Richmond in 1955, it was one of the first integrated daycares in the region. CMS, which continues to work in Black communities, was also active during the civil rights movement.

Sister Tiberh Hagos serves as the human concerns director at St. Elizabeth, Richmond, a largely Black parish. She has been a member of CMS for 30 years and is its mission education coordinator. She felt called by God to help the poor in much the same way as Father Comboni.

"My vocation is from the Lord; words cannot explain it well. It's beyond our reason, human wisdom

and facts," she said. "I was captivated by the dream of Comboni's trust to the African people. The intercultural and intergenerational spirit of Comboni from the very beginning captivated me."

Sister Tiberh's work has brought her from Ethiopia, where she was raised, to Italy, Jordan, Dubai, Brazil and the United States. She works personally with refugees, many of whom are from Africa, who have escaped their plight to find a new life in the United States.

She explained that this transition is not easy and that refugees need a strong support system to thrive. Faithful to Father Comboni's mission, St. Elizabeth parishioners welcome refugees into their faith community and assist them in finding affordable housing and employment. They provide transportation to and from job interviews, school, church, English classes, grocery stores and other places. They help translate bills, letters and menus.

Sister Maria Cecilia works mainly with the growing Latin population at Our Lady of Lourdes, Richmond, and the surrounding community doing similar work as Sister Tiberh. She and other CMS members participate in inter-congregational gatherings, intercultural food festivals and forums on diversity and inclusion.

Outreach at the border

Beyond Richmond, Sister Maria Cecilia also organizes trips to the U.S.-Mexico border to assist asylum seekers. There, CMS members provide food, clothing, shoes, toiletries, paper and crayons for children, and rosaries to those hoping to enter the country.

"The presence of migrants and asylum seekers on both sides of the southern border demands people of faith to reach out and stand in solidarity with migrants and refugees, particularly women and children," she said.

Sister Mercedes Castillo ministers at shelters and border control detention centers. Though she brings food and other essentials, she also brings attention and compassion.

"I listen to their stories. We pray together and bring hope into their lives. To encounter them and to be with them is so important because they do not feel alone in their struggle to find a better life," she said.

Another coveted item Sister Mercedes brings are shoelaces, which she calls "life savers." She relayed that border patrol agents confiscate refugees' shoelaces when they enter detention centers as a safety precaution. When they are released, their shoelaces aren't returned. This makes them easy targets for human traffickers who

See *Missionaries*, Page 12

'Call of the Gospel' shapes Father Asare's priesthood

Jubilant's focus, joy is 'service to God's people'

JANNA REYNOLDS
The Catholic Virginian

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son" (Jn 3:16).

"I always say that is the call of the Gospel. That is the love of God. That is why God sent his son, to save us," said Father John Asare of his favorite Scripture passage. "Because of the love of God, I am being called to become a priest, and as a priest, it is my duty to help people to attain salvation."

In the 25 years since he was ordained a priest, Father Asare has served the people of God on three continents as a pastor, formator, teacher and student. Each place had a "unique culture" that has helped shape the priest he is today.

He first felt the call to priesthood at age 10 or 11.

"I was attracted to the vocation because I was serving on the altar," he recalled of his childhood in the Archdiocese of Kumasi, Ghana. "I had the opportunity also to visit the mission churches with the pastors there, and all these things kept my interest in becoming a priest."

After middle school, Father

Asare attended a minor seminary in Kumasi for seven years. He was then called for what the priest termed "the national service" in Ghana. After this service, he got permission to study philosophy at St. Pauls Catholic Seminary and then continued his education at St. Peters Regional Seminary, where he studied theology until 1997.

Following his ordination on July 19 of that year, Father Asare was appointed to be a teacher at a high school seminary for five years. For the first two years of that assignment, he also served as a parochial vicar; for the final three years, he was a parish pastor.

In Ghana, Father Asare said, "when it comes to celebrating the Mass, it takes time – sometimes two to three hours to finish Sunday Mass."

After Mass, "everybody can



Father John Asare

come to you at any time without making appointments," he added. "So, the life there in Ghana is like we were more involved with the people in the sense that you can go at any time, to visit with anybody at any time."

From 2002-2004, Father Asare earned his master's degree in philosophy at the Pontifical University Urbaniana in Rome. He was given

just three months to learn Italian, the language in which all of his classes would be given.

"It taught me to be hardworking in order to pass," he said with a laugh.

As a student in Rome, the priest said he met "many priests, many religious" seeking a vocation in service to the Church. "And all these things also have shaped my desire to hang on no matter what," he said.

The priest then returned to Ghana and was appointed a formator and philosophy teacher at St. Pauls Catholic Seminary in Accra, where he served "for 11 good years."

In 2015, Father Asare received his first assignment in the Diocese of Richmond as parochial vicar at St. Bede, Williamsburg.

He commented on the large parish, where "you meet many people at any weekend." He said he found that when he shared his life and told the people about Ghana, they would become more interested and ask questions to learn more about him and his country.

The priest experienced a difference in culture between the U.S. and Ghana, which was in the way that "before people can come to you (here), they need to make an appointment or whatever; they can't just come, or I can't just go and visit with and formate people."

So, he changed his style of working.

"I needed to know the culture of people and see what I can do to help the people," he said.

While serving in the Diocese of Richmond, Father Asare has found joy in visiting the sick, which "apart from the celebration of the Mass," he deemed his favorite part of being a priest.

See *Jubilant*, Page 9

Jubilant's vocation was already rooted at age 10

Father Maxwell enjoys 'togetherness in the Church' he experiences in Richmond

BRIAN T. OLSZEWSKI
The Catholic Virginian

Father Joseph Maxwell Appiagyeyi is one of those rare people who, as an adult, became what he said he would become when he was a child.

"We were having dinner. My father asked, 'What do you want to be in your future?' I said, 'I want to be a priest.' He got quiet. And he asked me again, 'Doctor? Engineer? Pharmacist?' I said, 'Even if I become all of those, I will become a priest.'"

On Tuesday, July 19, Father Maxwell, a priest of the Diocese of Obuasi, Ghana, and pastor of St. Peter Pro-Cathedral, St. Patrick, and St. John, Richmond, celebrated 25 years of priesthood with a Mass at St. John.

"He was surprised to hear that. He used to be an altar server and had wanted to become a priest, but he couldn't make it. My mother wanted me to become a priest, too," Father Maxwell, 54, said. "I am happy about that."

While his father was Catholic and his mother Anglican, Father Maxwell said that was not a problem.

"I had faith-filled parents," said the fifth of seven children born to Peter and Victoria Appiagyeyi. "My mother was faithful to God; my father was faithful, too," he said.

In 1990, at the age of 23, Fa-

ther Maxwell entered St. Paul Major Seminary, Accra, for a year of discernment and two years of philosophical studies. His bishop sent him to Rome for formation at the International Ecclesiastical Seminary and for theological studies at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, where he obtained a bachelor's degree in sacred theology in 1996.

Shortly before Father Maxwell was ordained a deacon that year, he experienced what he termed "the happiest moment in my life" — his mother became Catholic.

"It had been my job to bring her home to the Catholic Church," he said.

Father Maxwell returned to the Diocese of Obuasi for a pastoral year program before being ordained a priest in 1997. His first assignment was as parochial vicar at the Cathedral of St. Thomas, Obuasi, where he served for five years. In 2002, he returned to the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross to study moral theology. He received his licentiate in 2004.



Father Joseph Maxwell Appiagyeyi

For the next 15 years, Father Maxwell ministered in his home diocese as an acting pastor at one parish, pastor of another, and as rector of the Cathedral of St. Thomas. In diocesan administration, he was director of the Vocations and Youth Offices, and vicar general and moderator of the curia for the diocese. He also served as a dean, a member of the priests' council and college of consultors,

and on the personnel board. As an adjunct lecturer, he taught moral theology at St. Gregory the Great Provincial Major Seminary.

During the summers of 2010-2012, Father Maxwell assisted at the Shrine Church of St. Jude and Our Lady of Guadalupe, Brooklyn, N.Y. He wanted to continue ministering in the United States, but his request to do so was put on hold when the bishop of Obuasi was named archbishop of Kumasi.

"My bishop was transferred (in 2012)," Father Maxwell said about his request to undertake "another ministry" in the United States. "We had to take care of the diocese before the new bishop arrived. We couldn't travel (outside the country) until 2014."

When the new bishop arrived, he asked the priest to wait "just for a while" until things got settled.

Father Maxwell came to the Diocese of Richmond in July 2019, and was appointed parochial vicar of St. Edward the Confessor, Richmond, and chaplain of Blessed Sacrament Huguenot Catholic School, Powhatan. In July 2021, he was named administrator of his current parishes, and this July 1 was named pastor of them.

Father Maxwell said he enjoys ministering in Richmond, noting that the pace is slower than it is in the Diocese of Obuasi.

"In Ghana we have to do so many things," he explained. "I'd have to do my parish and 25 different mission churches — run around to all those mission churches. Here, it is a bit relaxed."

The jubilant likes moving among the congregations of his three parishes.

"I can spend more time with the people," he said. "I enjoy the togetherness we have in the Church."

Reflecting on his priesthood, Father Maxwell said, "Looking at how far the Lord has brought me, 25 years in his vineyard, I would like to join the psalmist to gladly say: 'the cup of salvation I will lift up and call upon the name of the Lord for he has remembered me in my lowly state, therefore to him be the glory forever.'"

Desire to serve led to answering call to priesthood

Father Spencer grateful for support during 40 years of ministry

JANNA REYNOLDS
The Catholic Virginian

Father Robert M. Spencer always knew he was going to “work in the area of service,” having witnessed both of his parents work as civil servants, but he was not always certain that his life would include ordained service as a priest.

Now, having celebrated his 40th anniversary on May 8, Father Spencer does not question his decision to pursue a vocation to the priesthood.

“There have been ups and downs, but it’s been rewarding, and I have no regrets,” he said. “I feel like I’ve done my best, and I think the Lord has been part of my ministry, guiding me along the way.”

He first began to consider the priesthood during the summer after his junior year at Douglas S. Freeman High School in Henrico County. Then, after attending what is now known as the Christian Awakening retreat, the idea became more concrete. He talked to his parish priest, thought about it, and after high school was on his way to the seminary.

The jubilarian attended St. Mary’s Seminary College in Catonsville, Maryland, but about two and a half years into formation, he decided to step away.

“I didn’t question my faith; I questioned whether or not this was what I wanted to do. I always knew that I’d be doing something in the area of service...” said Father Spencer, “but then

I just wanted to take some time out to see if (priesthood) was the right path.”

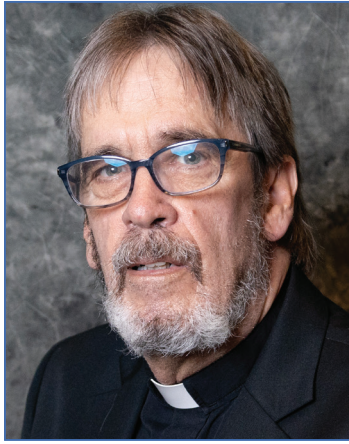
He attended Virginia Commonwealth University “on a very part time basis” and worked as a cashier and clerk at the Medical College of Virginia.

“I was accepted to go back to St. Mary’s College (in Catonsville), and they closed the following week,” he said with a chuckle, “so that’s how I ended up at St. Meinrad’s for one year to finish up my (bachelor’s) degree.”

Father Spencer completed his Master of Divinity from St. Mary’s Seminary in Baltimore in 1981. He was ordained a priest by Bishop Walter F. Sullivan on May 8, 1982, and his first assignment was associate pastor of St. Edward the Confessor, North Chesterfield, where he served until 1985.

Father Spencer then served as parochial vicar of St. Paul, Richmond (1985); Church of the Epiphany, Richmond (1985-1986); and Church of the Ascension, Virginia Beach (1986-1987).

Alongside Father Bob Krenik, he became co-pastor of Our Lady of Peace, Appomattox; St. Theresa, Farmville; and Church of the Nativity, Farmville, in 1987, and they also min-



Father Robert M. Spencer

istered to the state prison. The priests worked together for two years before Father Krenik moved on.

For one year, Father Spencer had an associate pastor at those locations, Father Jim Ditty, “and then after that, the reassignment was done,” he recalled. “The last five years I was there, I had the parish (St. Theresa, Farmville) and Longwood and Hampton-Sydney campuses.”

After leaving St. Theresa in 1995, Father Spencer served as pastor at St. Joseph, Petersburg (1995-2007); Immaculate Heart of Mary and Sacred Heart, Farmville, and St. John the Baptist, Crewe (2006-2007); Our Lady of Lourdes, Henrico (2007-2013); and St. Gerard, Roanoke (2013-2015). He has been pastor of St. Kateri Tekakwitha, Tabb, since 2016.

“With my first assignment, St. Edward’s, the entire staff was very, very supportive knowing that I was new and probably also being very patient with me,” he said, “and as I come toward the end, the people at St. Kateri have been wonderful and very supportive of me from the day I arrived.”

As he considered his four-decade vocation, Father Spencer said he felt most challenged by his encounter with Hispanic ministry while serving at St.

Joseph, Petersburg, and St. Gerard, Roanoke.

“I found that challenging because that was a second language for me, and there again, people helped me,” he said. “I had two good tutors, and I think I was fairly effective there, but it definitely was a challenge – not only learning the language, but also the culture – but it was very rewarding.”

Another fulfilling part of the priest’s ministry is, of course, the Eucharist on Sunday.

“That’s what I look forward to the most every week, and still, after 40 years, enjoying it,” he said. “And the feedback I get is that I’m a pretty good preacher, so I feel like I’m reaching and touching people.”

Making connections with individuals and maintaining relationships have been a significant part of Father Spencer’s ministry.

“I’ve been good with pretty much all ages, from the senior citizens down to the young altar servers, so those have always been good relationships, which makes liturgy a lot easier,” he said.

He also noted that close confidants in the parish, people who “know how a parish works” that were sometimes able to change his mind on various matters, and friends outside of the parish have been influential to him.

“There’s always been a group in the parish that has been very supportive of me, and I think that definitely got me through,” he said. “I think I had a good mix of people supporting me.”

IN MEMORIAM

Father B. Daniel Bond Jr.



The Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated Tuesday, July 12, for Father B. Daniel Bond Jr. at St. Mary, Richmond. Father Bond, 87, died on Monday, July 4.

A native of Lynchburg, Father Bond graduated in 1958 with a degree in philosophy from the College of William & Mary. Following graduation, he worked for seven years in hotel management in the Virgin Islands and California.

He returned to Richmond in 1966 where he worked for the Division of Motor Vehicles. He entered St. Mary’s Seminary University, Baltimore, in 1980. On May 12, 1984, he was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Richmond.

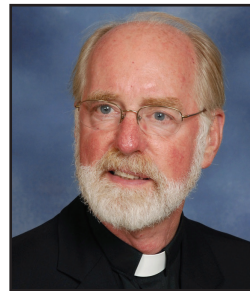
Father Bond served as parochial vicar at Church of the Holy Spirit, Virginia Beach (1984-1986), and St. Paul, Richmond (1986-1989). His pastorates included Church of the Visitation, Topping, and St. Francis de Sales, Mathews (1989-1997), and St. James, Hopewell (1997-2005).

He retired in 2005 but remained active in ministry through 2010.

Father Bond was preceded in death by Belah Daniel Bond Sr., Edna B. Campbell and Edward L. Brauer (brother) and F.P. “Buddy” Brauer (brother). He is survived by Lee Anne LaFerme, Jerry Page Weaver, Randy Brauer, Brad Brauer and Chris Brauer; and his friend, Patty Spacek.

IN MEMORIAM

Father Charles L. Breindel



The Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated Saturday, July 30, 11 a.m., at St. Gregory the Great, Virginia Beach, for Father Charles L. Breindel. Father Breindel, 74, died Saturday, July 16.

A native of St. Mary’s, Pennsylvania, Father Breindel held two graduate degrees in math and earned a doctorate in health administration and planning

from Penn State University in 1978. He earned a bachelor’s in sacred theology from the Catholic University of America in 2000 — the year he was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Richmond.

His first assignments were as parochial vicar at St. Edward the Confessor, North Chesterfield (2000-2001), and Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Newport News (2001-2002).

Father Breindel was named to his first pastorate, Sacred Heart, Danville, in 2002, where in served until 2011. During that time, he was also pastor of St. Paschal Baylon, South Boston, and St. Elizabeth of Hungry, Brookneal (2004-2008).

He served as pastor of Church of the Ascension, Virginia Beach (2011-2013) and Holy Spirit, Christiansburg, and Holy Family, Pearisburg (2013-2015).

Father Breindel chaired the Diocesan Pastoral Planning Commission from 2005 to 2010.

CCC continues to walk with women, children in need

GUEST COMMENTARY
JAY BROWN

As Commonwealth Catholic Charities (CCC) prepares for our 100th year of service within the Diocese of Richmond, I am reminded of the reason we exist. CCC's imperative to serve the vulnerable grew from an urgent need for a Catholic child welfare agency able to provide safe environments and professional services for children, women and families.

CCC — then known as the Bureau of Catholic Charities — was founded in 1923 with a focus on providing professional case work especially for women experiencing crisis pregnancies.

As one of the oldest and most respected pregnancy counseling programs in the Commonwealth, CCC has long been a source of help and hope for women and families in crisis situations. For de-

cade, women have chosen CCC for the high level of personalized and compassionate support they receive.

CCC's adoption, pregnancy counseling and foster care ministries touched the lives of more than 2,000 individuals in 2021 alone and have been life-affirming resources in communities all across the Diocese of Richmond throughout the century.

In 2021, recognizing an increase in homelessness among women seeking our pregnancy counseling services, CCC launched Seton Housing with the support of a grant from the Diocese of Richmond's Respect Life Fund, generous donors and parishes like St. Mary, Richmond. This innovative program provides safe, independent housing, pregnancy counseling and case management services for moms who, but for stable housing, would choose to parent or place their child in an adoptive home.

Seton Housing is designed to provide the

support that women need to make life affirming decisions, welcome healthy babies, and achieve long-term independence and self-sufficiency. Transitioning families from a situation of crisis and fear to stability and confidence not only affirms life but offers continued support and opportunities for families and individuals to thrive.

At a time when the national conversation has turned to the health and wellbeing of women and their children, we are expanding access to comprehensive support for women and babies — both during and after pregnancy. Your support allows us to walk with women when they need us, for as long as they need us. I welcome you to join us (www.cccofva.org/donate) as we build on our century-old foundation, providing quality and compassionate support for women, children and families in our communities.

Jay Brown is CEO of Commonwealth Catholic Charities.

Children don't deserve to die

Great news for women and men looking to avoid unwanted pregnancies!

Scientists have discovered what causes pregnancy in women and have found a way to prevent this condition that is considered by many to be a rude disruption to their lives.

It is 100% effective, and best of all — it's free! It is called abstinence, and apparently, this amazing tool was given to us by our Creator many years ago but has been mostly ignored. It has also been uncovered that our Creator intended that his creation (us) increase and multiply by means of sexual intercourse and, as a bonus, made it enjoyable to most.

Early on, however, many humans flipped this concept and selfishly decided that they only wanted to partake of the fun part without any of the consequences. This has resulted in the murder, yes, murder, of millions of unborn children whose lives and souls began at their conception.

These children did not deserve to die because of the sins of their parents, no matter under what circumstances they were conceived! Yes, a woman's uterus is the growing chamber of the baby, but that fact does not entitle her to "terminate," i.e., murder, another human being. Is not murder illegal? Is not murder a mortal sin?

There are abundant resources to help mothers- and fathers-to-be navigate the physical, spiritual, financial and emotional rollercoaster of pregnancy. Some are called pregnancy centers and they assist anyone who seeks their help. Some are called churches and they assist anyone who seeks their help.

Please, seek help. Choose life. Choose love.

— Suzanne L. Rose
Columbia

Why 'too many' Catholics reject doctrine of Real Presence

We are grateful for the bishops' effort to promote The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. We can identify three reasons why too many Catholics reject so fundamental a

doctrine. First, poor catechesis over two generations. I've observed a feel-good communitarianism and a God so friendly he wouldn't countenance hell being emphasized over salvational truths of faith, which often require self-denial and willingness to stand apart. Feelings given paramount importance.

Second, we live in an age in which, by their successes, science and technology have replaced religion's claims to truth. The two are not seen as revealing God or as instrumental to human life and felicity, but have become themselves the standard of truth in a shallow philosophy called "scientism" in which they are said to supplant non-empirical methods of theology, philosophy, morals, art.

That's nonsense, of course. Indeed, self-refuting nonsense, but it is felt in the air we breathe and being a vaguely felt sentiment. And there we are, again, feelings.

Third is deep dissonance within the Church, for while she stoutly proclaims the doctrine of the Real Presence, she acts as if it cannot matter all that much. It's clearly apparent in bishops' failing to give pastoral counsel or publicly to discipline Catholic officials who persistently enable and celebrate abortion.

Such Catholics receive the Real Presence in Holy Communion in a state of mortal sin as demonstrated in that very persistence. Thus, officials and their shepherds give scandal to the faithful, while also bringing disrepute on the shepherds — a disrepute ramified in failures publicly to support that courageous minority of fellow shepherds who do.

— Robert Mosby
Williamsburg

Editor's note: Before judging another's "state of mortal sin," one would do well to familiarize oneself with what the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: "Mortal sin requires full knowledge and complete consent. It presupposes knowledge of the sinful character of the act, of its opposition to God's law. It also implies a consent sufficiently deliberate to be a personal choice" (CCC #1859).

Teachings of faith must be our guide

I agree with John D. Stec's thoughts, "Let faith be your guide when voting" (Catholic Virginian, July 11). Elections do have consequences, and we must cast our votes guided by the teachings of our faith.

The single businessman he cites, who, at times, refused to rent apartments to Black people, stole his workers' wages, assaulted women, encouraged his supporters to use violence, called responsible criticism of him "fake," and boasted of his wealth, became POTUS in 2016.

For the next four years, his daily degrading and insulting of poor people, people of color, women, people with disabilities, immigrants, Muslims, political opponents and others cultivated a national atmosphere of division and malice and gave white supremacist gangs a champion in the White House.

He undid hard won protections for people and the planet, downplayed a pandemic that has killed over one million Americans, and made the richest even richer through tax cuts.

Jesus, in contrast, spoke truth, refused earthly power, warned against accumulating riches, inaugurated God's kingdom belonging to the poor and outcast, and loved even his enemies — renouncing violence, he died rather than harm his opponents. Yes, may the teachings of our faith be our guide.

— Steve Baggary
Norfolk

'Politics is dividing Church'

In "VCC consistently addresses

gun violence" (Catholic Virginian, July 11), Virginia Catholic Conference director Jeff Caruso shows why our Church should not be involved in politics.

People are not going to join, attend and donate to any organization that they don't agree with. Because of this, Church leadership should not involve the Church in political issues and each one of us should consider our religious beliefs on our own when choosing political candidates to support.

If you would rather try to survive an attack from a person with a knife or rock than a semi-automatic gun as Ellen Williams stated (Catholic Virginian, July 11) then it is your prerogative to vote for anti-gun politicians.

I personally would rather try to survive those attacks with my own firearm since the only difference in dying by knife, rock or gun is the speed in which you die.

The disagreement among us on so many political issues means that many of us are not going to be happy with the VCC political positions, whatever they are. This is important because people aren't going to physically, emotionally or financially support a Church that they don't agree with politically, just as they aren't going to support a politician that they don't agree with.

The VCC political viewpoints therefore — perhaps counter intuitively — reduce our Church's ability to spread the Gospel. Politics is dividing our Church just like it is dividing the public.

— Rick Kurek
Yorktown

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Seven ways to get teens excited about Mass

MARK HART

Catholic News Service

My cradle Catholic parents instilled in me the importance of going to Mass religiously (no pun intended) but were never able to articulate why we went, answering only “because we are Catholic and that is what good Catholics do.”

It wasn't until a youth minister explained the significance, depth and beauty of the Mass that my eyes (and heart) were truly opened.

Slowly, over time, I began to see the liturgy differently. It was as though, with every fact and insight I learned, the dots began to connect between the history and the mystery – between God's divinity and our humanity, all colliding within the parish walls.

I was given a great gift, a proverbial “pearl of great price” by a soul who not only knew about the Mass but who was patient enough to walk with me as my heart and soul opened up to this timeless, inestimable treasure from heaven.

We all desire for the next generation to develop a deep and abiding love for Scripture and the sacraments, in particular the Eucharist, but how do we develop and “unleash” that love in an increasingly overstimulated, disengaged, and screen-obsessed culture?

After more than 25 years in youth ministry, I have found out the hard way what does and doesn't work to engage hormone-packed tech-savvy adolescents with the Catholic faith.

Here are some of my suggestions to help teens get excited about Mass:

Our teenagers need our time more than our teaching points.

It's important to meet our teenagers where they're at, without any expectation of them changing their disinterest (or even repulsion) of Mass overnight. With this patience (that only comes from God), they



A teenager is silhouetted as he prays during Mass at St. John the Evangelist Church in Greece, N.Y., Nov. 23, 2014. (CNS photo/Mike Crupi, Catholic Courier)

have the space to grow and encounter God for themselves.

The key to evangelization that many well-intentioned ministry leaders sorely miss is this: If you want someone to care about the “what” (Church teaching), they must first encounter the “who” (Lord). Everything we do in the Mass points to worship and to who God is.

You show teenagers who God is through how you live your faith: The reverence with which you receive the body and blood of Jesus, the time you spend in adoration and Scripture and the way you interact with Jesus in the Mass like he's sitting next to you, arms wrapped around you.

They will see that, undeniably, something beyond this world is transpiring before their eyes and begin to encounter the “who” that is the source of the “what.”

Go the extra mile. If you want your teenagers or the teens in your parish to really engage in the Mass, it begins with asking yourself this question, “How far am I willing to go for that to happen?”

Are you willing to be a consistent example to your own kids of

what it means to enter into worship? Are you willing to fulfill your baptismal call and sacramental pledge to raise them “according to the law of Christ and his church” (i.e. take them to Mass whether they want to go or not)? Are you willing to help equip the youth minister with the right resources to aid their catechetical efforts?

Connect it all to Scripture. An understanding and love for Scripture comprise the groundwork for a deeper experience of Mass and the sacraments. After all, the entire Mass is based in Scripture!

I know firsthand how difficult it is to engage overstimulated modern teens with the word of God. And I've found that the best way to do this is for them to see themselves reflected in the story of salvation (so it becomes relatable), not shying away from their toughest questions (to give you credibility) and showing them the big picture of scripture (to show them how all the aspects of their faith connect).

I created “Venture: The Bible Timeline for High School” to help teenagers all over the world learn about the Bible. With resources like

this, teenagers encounter a love for Scripture that they will carry with them into their college years and beyond.

Be consistent. Consistency speaks to the fundamental importance of something. Give your teens the gift of consistency. Parents, take your teens to Mass no matter what, regardless of if they “feel like it.” No breaks. No excuses (not even on vacation). Actions follow beliefs.

Sit in the front. Teens are easily distracted. Instead of taking the typical “Catholic” route of sitting in the back of the church at Mass, bring your family front and center. Because we are integrated beings, our minds and souls follow the actions of our bodies. Nearer to the altar, teens will have a deeper sensory experience of the Mass, feeling like they are part of the experience and not just witnessing it. Encourage them to participate in the hymns and responses.

Come with intentionality and intentions. For each Mass you attend, bring a specific person or intention to offer up to the Lord and encourage your teens to do the same. Do a “sound-off” of intentions before you get out of the car to go to Mass.

Keep learning. A true disciple is an eternal student. Continue to learn more about the Mass, Scripture, and the Bible for yourself. And finally, ask the Lord to give you a spirit of wisdom, patience and joy, because we can do nothing without him.

Hart is chief innovation officer for Life Teen International. A graduate of the University of Notre Dame and a 27-seven year veteran of youth ministry, he is a best-selling author of over 20 books, a daily radio host on SiriusXM and an award-winning writer and producer. His latest project is “Venture: The Bible Timeline for High School,” ascensionpress.com/venture.

Archbishop embarks upon path to end nuclear threat

DENNIS SADOWSKI

Catholic News Service

CLEVELAND — Archbishop John C. Wester of Santa Fe, New Mexico, thinks it's time for serious conversations about how to achieve nuclear disarmament — not just for the United States but for all countries of the world.

And he's trying to initiate such discussions, beginning in his own archdiocese, home of two national laboratories — Sandia and Los Alamos — where nuclear weapon research and development continues.

The archbishop hopes the pastoral letter he released in January, “Living in the Light of Christ's Peace: A Conversation Toward Nuclear Disarmament,” can be a starting point.

The document is the most recent and perhaps most heartfelt from a U.S. bishop seeking to end the nuclear arms race. His concern is that after decades in which arms control treaties led to reductions in nuclear armaments, a new arms

race is already underway as the U.S. and Russia develop new weapons systems.

“I think we've been lulled into a false sense of complacency. I think it's important as the archbishop of Santa Fe that I say something, that the archdiocese has a seat at the table on this discussion, because this is the birthplace of the nuclear bomb,” Archbishop Wester told Catholic News Service.

Motivation for letter

Several occurrences pushed Archbishop Wester to draft the letter.

In 2017, he visited Japan with other U.S. bishops, stopping in the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. An estimated 214,000 people died in twin atomic blasts days apart in August 1945, hastening the end of World War II. It was the only time nuclear weapons have been used in war.

Back in Santa Fe weeks later, Archbishop Wester took friends to the Bradbury Science

Museum, which chronicles the story of the development of nuclear weapons at the nearby Los Alamos National Laboratory.

“Seeing the museum and the creation of these bombs, it just struck me how here I am in the center of all this,” Archbishop Wester said. “I had a very somber visit to Japan laid on top of this realization of how much we're involved then and now in nuclear armament production.”

His concern is that in any future nuclear exchange, however limited, Earth will never be the same and it's likely the planet — and virtually all life — will be destroyed.

Pope Francis also had a role in Archbishop Wester's decision to issue the pastoral letter.

Throughout his papacy the pope has appealed to the world's nine nuclear weapons-possessing nations to dismantle their arsenals for the good of humanity. In 2017 the Holy See became the first government to sign the Treaty on the

See Disarmament, Page 9

Heed Pope Francis' call to revere the elderly



IN LIGHT OF FAITH
BARBARA HUGHES

Can you imagine what it must have been like to give birth to and parent the child who was chosen to be the mother of God and then realize their grandson would be God himself?

That was the gift that was bestowed upon the most venerated grandparents in all of creation. Little is known about the lives of Sts. Anne and Joachim, but legends surrounding this holy couple can be found among the early Christian apocryphal writings. According to early Christian tradition, Anne was childless for much of the couple's married life. As devout Jews, this would have been more than a source of disappointment; it would be looked upon as a sign of God's disfavor, but that's not how the story ended.

Like with Sarah and Hannah in the Old Testament, and later Elizabeth, God intervened. In each case, the child was born from the natural order through sexual relations, which was also true when Anne and Joachim were blessed with a child.

According to the Protoevangelium of James, which dates to the third century, the anguish of being childless led Joachim to retreat to the desert while Anne stayed home, praying that God would grant them a child. During this period, each received a visit from an angel who told them that they were to have a child



who would be favored by God.

With this assurance, the couple reunited, had sexual relations, and their prayers were answered. In remaining faithful to a promise that Anne made while she was pregnant, Mary was taken to the temple in Jerusalem at the age of three where she was dedicated to God and remained until the 12th year of her life.

As early as the fourth century, Anne was esteemed by the Eastern Church, but it was not until the sixth century that she was introduced to the West. By the 15th century, devotion to Joachim became popular, though each saint was memorialized individually. However, in keeping with the esteem the Church holds regarding marriage, the feast of Anne and Joachim is celebrated on July 26.

This year marks the second anniversary of what Pope Francis designated as a time to honor not only grandparents, but all the elderly. The Holy Father reminded us of their ongoing vocation, which is to

help form younger generations. In a homily marking the occasion, Pope Francis said:

"Old age is not a 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 special sensibility that those of us who are elderly have for the concerns, thoughts and the affections that make us human should once again become the vocation of many.

"It would be a sign of our love for the younger generations. This would be our own contribution to the revolution of tenderness, a spiritual and non-violent revolution in which I encourage you, dear grandparents and elderly persons, to take an active role" (Message of his holiness Pope Francis for the second World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly).

In our culture, there are elderly people who are neglected and who feel estranged or useless. So it is with

renewed appreciation for the aged that Pope Francis calls us to revere the elderly, whether we are related to them or not. With his own health declining, the words of the Holy Father are borne from personal experience. Like St. John Paul II, Pope Francis reminds us that the aging process is part of the human condition and failing physical health need not be a deterrent to the spiritual health of the Body of Christ.

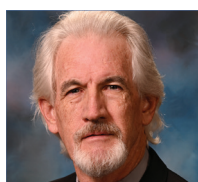
I recall my second grade teacher, Sister Mary Annunciata, telling us that the soul of a young person is like a small wayside chapel, but the souls of the elderly who have prayed throughout their lives are like beautiful cathedrals. It's a lovely analogy, one that has remained with me over the years.

Today, with so much emphasis on looking youthful, it's easy to lose sight of what's really important. At the end of our life, it won't matter what we look like, what we've achieved or how much wealth we've accumulated. The only thing that will matter is whether or not we've become the person that God has created us to be, which will be evident by the beauty of our soul.

May we all grow into beautiful cathedrals that will be a source of edification to a Church that is in need of young people to fill the pews being left vacant by an aging generation.

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

Put aside pride and recognize God in others



BELIEVE AS
YOU PRAY
DEACON CHRISTOPHER COLVILLE

If we take this weekend's readings at face value and interpret them literally, we might all be in trouble. The reading from Ecclesiastes tells us not to put our faith in anything under the sun and says that all things are vanity. Everything we have or achieve in this life is left to someone else when we die. So, putting our faith in these things, even wisdom, is vanity.

In the reading from Colossians, we are told that things of the Earth are not important. If we have been raised in Christ, it is things that are above, things that are of God, that we should seek.

The Gospel addresses the propensity we have for gathering things and building our life around things of the Earth. It sounds ominous to me, but there is hope.

If we put those things into context, we find hope — and hope doesn't disappoint.

The man in the parable is not condemned for his success, and we even pray in the psalm to "prosper the work of our hands." The man is condemned because he is too focused on storing his successful harvest. He is too focused on himself, evidenced by the number of times he uses "I" when talking about the situation. He has failed to realize he is part of something bigger than himself. He has lost sight of the real goal in life, and it is for these things he is condemned.

In telling us to put to death the things of the Earth, Paul isn't saying to get rid of them. He is telling us to change our mindset and challenging us to consider the purpose for which we have been given these things. Things of the

Earth should not be our focus because we have been raised with Christ to new life.

Things of this world, even wisdom of the mind, often become a source of pride. When the Scriptures talk about pride, they are not talking about the feeling of accomplishment in graduating from high school and college. They are not referring to the sense of accomplishment when a person discovers a cure for a disease or any other accomplishment. We

certainly should be proud of these things and others.

When the Scriptures talk about pride, they are referring to those times and things that replace our acknowledgement of God and his gifts in our lives. They are referring to the times we fail to recognize God in others.

When this happens, we should detest those things and times. They turn us away from our journey to God. When we let go of those things and acknowledge God as their source, God becomes more fully present in our lives.

Richard Rohr tells us in a reflection that the purpose of all religion is to seek greater union with God and to see God in all things (Daily Reflections, Center for Action and Contemplation, July 4, 2022). If greater union with God is our true destiny and God is love (1 John 4:16), then love is our true destiny.

In "No Man is an Island," Thomas Merton wrote: "In the twilight of life, God will not judge us on our earthly possessions and human success, but rather on how much we have loved."

When we love God totally, we are transformed and find our true destiny, recognizing the presence of God in others.

Deacon Christopher Colville serves at Church of the Redeemer, Mechanicsville.

Eighteenth Sunday Ordinary Time Cycle C

Ecc 1:2, 2:21-23; Ps 90: 3-6, 12-14, 17;

Col 3: 1-6,9-11; Lk 12: 13-16

Disarmament

Continued from Page 7

Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. The treaty entered into force in January 2021.

But it was the pope's comments during a November 2019 visit to Hiroshima that stayed with Archbishop Wester.

"The use of atomic energy for purposes of war is immoral, just as the possessing of nuclear weapons is immoral, as I already said two years ago," the pope said. "We will be judged on this."

Archbishop Wester recalled thinking that "the pope is right on target and whether people pay attention to him or not, I need to echo that sentiment."

Discuss alternatives to nuclear war

The archbishop set out to draft the pastoral letter, conferring with nuclear scientists, moral theologians, political leaders and disarmament advocates. The document challenges conventional political thinking that possessing nuclear weapons serves as a deterrent to potential attacks from other nuclear powers.

In the document, the archbishop describes his thoughts and the anguish of realizing how the Japanese children ran to the windows of their school to see what caused the bright flash only to be incinerated within seconds by the shock wave from the catastrophic nuclear explosion. He also recalls his own fears of running home from school in his San Francisco neighborhood during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis while scanning the skies for nuclear bombs being dropped from Soviet bombers.

Archbishop Wester said no child should have to live in such fear or face the possibility of nuclear annihilation. That's why he wrote his pastoral letter, he said.

He is contemplating his next steps

and how to use the letter to invite people of faith, nuclear scientists, government officials and military leaders to embark on the long journey to ending the nuclear threat. Among them is building a network involving parishes in the archdiocese to begin discussing alternatives to nuclear warfare.

"One of the main thrusts of the pastoral is to engage and sustain a conversation. It wasn't trying to create a debate or an argument. It was just trying to say this is an important issue. We need to talk about it. However you fall on this issue, we need to talk," he explained.

"My innate belief is if people really talk about it seriously and honestly and transparently, then they'll see this really is untenable," he said.

Archbishop Wester stressed that he is not calling for unilateral disarmament by the U.S. He acknowledges there are threats in the world and that all nuclear powers must agree to disarm together.

He also recognizes that the nuclear industry is worth billions of dollars annually to the New Mexico economy. He called for a "just transition" of jobs so that people are not forced to give up their livelihoods, but can begin working to use technology to the betterment of humanity.

"To me, I never thought about how I'm going up against Goliath here in New Mexico and the big labs and the billions of dollars that the federal government gives. I just thought this was the right thing to do. I didn't really care much about whether it was popular or not. I just thought this is the right thing to do," he told CNS.

Editor's note: The full text of Archbishop Wester's pastoral can be found online at <https://bit.ly/31xrw2F>

Jubilarian

Continued from Page 4

"Before I was ordained, I was afraid of going to the hospital to visit the sick... but when I became a priest, and especially here, like since St. Bede, anytime you have a call to visit the sick, I developed an interest. So now I have that desire and the joy of visiting the sick. I overcame the fear when I was growing up of visiting the sick in the hospital," he said.

The years Father Asare spent as a formator at St. Pauls Seminary was a very special part of his vocation; he called it "a big opportunity" that shaped his "understanding and the desire of the priesthood."

"There's always joy in helping people to become priests. In Ghana, when I see seminarians whom I've taught... I always have the joy of helping them to answer the call to the priesthood," he said.

At his current assignment at St. Mary, Blacksburg, where he has served as pastor since 2016, Father Asare is again able to interact with young people. This time, they are students who come to his parish from local universities.

"The joy that I had in Ghana is like meeting the students, especially when I meet them at the confessional," he said. He added

that the students attend confession often, and he has increased his availability for the sacrament since arriving at the parish.

Father Asare expressed gratefulness for the "effective and efficient" staff and good council members and volunteers of St. Mary for the "enormous help" they provide.

"When I came, I talked to them about the need for them to help me. So as St. Paul said, we have various gifts, so each member should bring his or her gift to the table," said Father Asare. "So I used the term at my first pastoral council meeting, 'all hands on deck,' and indeed, they have helped me."

Reflecting on reaching this milestone, Father Asare said that the years passed quickly, "but the desire, the attraction, is still there. We are ordained for the service of God's people, and that desire to serve God's people is still there."

"It's all about thanking God for who we are... and we continue to ask him to help us do that work," he added. "I chose as my anniversary motto, 'if you can put it that way, (God is) our help in ages past and our hope for years to come.' So I know he has helped me in the last 25 years, and then for the years ahead of me, I believe he is going to help me."

WHAT WE'VE HEARD

Good people doing good things: The Ryan Club, a Catholic club in the Norfolk area that has been supporting charitable causes in the Tidewater area since 1950, continued its legacy of generosity by donating \$9,000 — \$1,000 to each of the Catholic schools in Norfolk, Virginia Beach and Portsmouth — from the Ryan Club Charitable Trust Fund. The money will help schools provide students with necessities that their parents might not be able to afford. Founded in 1949, the Ryan Club is named for Msgr. Leo Ryan, the founding pastor of Blessed Sacrament Parish and long-time vicar general of the Diocese of Richmond.

Celebrating with kindness: When Knights of Columbus Council 13170 at St. Gabriel Parish, Richmond, celebrated its 20th anniversary the weekend of June 18-19, its members marked the occasion by providing women with carnations and children with balloons and snacks.

Mission control: Bon Secours has named Scott Opperman as vice president of mission for the Bon Secours Hampton Road market. His focus will be on leading the integration of Bon Secours' mission and values into that market's culture, as well as all strategies, operations and decisions.

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.

YOUNG ADULT RETREAT

PRaise the Lord from the rising of the sun to its setting

Ramada Plaza | October 21 - 23, 2022
Nags Head Oceanfront | 7:00PM Friday - 12:00PM Sunday

All young adults (ages 18-39) are invited to our annual diocesan young adult retreat for a weekend of prayer and relaxation

PRICING:

\$175/PERSON

*Save \$25 if you register by July 31!

Registration closes Sunday, September 18
but don't wait, there are limited spots available!

READY TO REGISTER?

Head to our website today,
[Evangelizerichmond.org/OFE-Events](https://www.Evangelizerichmond.org/OFE-Events)

Featuring Speaker:
Paul George



OPPORTUNITIES

SHORTTAKES

Mary's Choice RVA is seeking a part-time executive assistant, part-time bookkeeper and a one-time event coordinator. If interested, please contact the executive director at maryschoice@maryschoicerva.org for more information.

Star of the Sea Parish, Virginia Beach, is seeking a full-time (36 hours/week) music coordinator. The music coordinator will collaborate with the pastor and other staff members in implementing and providing music for all parish liturgies and other parish celebrations.

Must work well with others to plan, evaluate and set objectives, with the specific focus on music. They will recruit and schedule musicians for all Sunday and other major liturgical celebrations. They will plan and organize appropriate music for Sunday and seasonal liturgical celebrations with the pastor and those involved with liturgy. They will also recruit, train and support the instrumentalists, choir members and cantors, while scheduling and holding rehearsals.

Assist parishioners needing music for weddings and funerals. They will develop and maintain a list of instrumentalists, organists and cantors available to assist with weddings and funerals.

Will work within their budget, help prepare the budget and monitor the authorized expenses to ensure keeping in line with the budget.

Must maintain a level of knowledge and skills required for the ministry, through music lessons, reading and attending workshops and conventions. They also participate in regional, diocesan and national professional organizations, as approved and appropriate.

Qualifications include being a Roman Catholic participating in regular worship. A degree in music is preferred or equivalent education and experience. Has a developed skill in at least one musical instrument. Demonstrates good organizational skills and has good volunteer leadership skills. Has knowledge of computer skills especially with music software.

Please contact Father Steve DeLeon at frsteve@staroftheseeparish.com to apply.

Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church, Palmyra, is seeking applicants for coordinator of religious education and youth ministry. A bachelor's degree in religious studies or related field, Pathways certification and ongoing formation preferred. The successful applicant must be a practicing Catholic in good standing. This position is responsible for overseeing the faith formation programs for elementary grade levels through adult, sacramental preparation, RCIA and youth ministry. This is a 35-hour-per-week position with regular weekend events and occasional evening meetings, including work every Sunday morning. Please submit a completed Diocese of Richmond employment application with a cover letter and résumé to: pas_tor@saintspeterpaul.org.

Join Father John Kazibwe from Church of the Epiphany on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and Jordan, April 19-29, 2023, for the most incredible spiritual experience of your life. For \$4,399 you receive round-trip airfare, 4-star hotels, daily Mass, breakfast and dinner, and much more! As we walk in Jesus' footsteps in Jerusalem, a few places on the itinerary include the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Garden of Gethsemane and the Basilica of Agony, and the Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu. In Tiberias, we will sail through the Sea of Galilee, tour places like Nazareth, and witness the site of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. We will spend two nights in Amman and visit Petra, one of the magnificent Seven Wonders of the World. For further information, contact Alba Kim at 804-298-4035 or email: tours@albastours.com. You can also visit the website: <https://www.albastours.com/>. Reservations are available now. Spaces are limited.

Are you a parent of a deceased child? To meet the spiritual needs of parents whose children of any age have died by any cause, no matter how long ago, the Diocese of Richmond now offers the Emmaus Journey. Join us Saturday, Aug. 13, at Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Newport News, for a faith-based, day-long, spiritual retreat for grieving parents offered by a team which includes grieving parents, spiritual directors, priests, deacons and parish leaders. The Emmaus Journey offers a safe place where you can seek peace, comfort and hope. Learn more and register for Emmaus Journey Retreat at evangelizerichmond.org/events/emmausretreat.

The Catholic Golden Age – Our Lady of Peace Chapter, Richmond, is sponsoring a trip to the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, D.C., Monday Aug. 15. We will attend the solemn high Mass of the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin. After Mass, we will go to Cracker Barrel in Fredericksburg for a late lunch. All ages are welcome to join us. Cost of trip is \$47, which does not include lunch at Cracker Barrel. Reservations and payment must be received by Monday, Aug. 4. Call Peggy Nitz at 804-272-0769 for details.

St. Edward Knights of Columbus Shrimp Fest: All you can eat! Fried shrimp, low country boil, sauté shrimp, French fries, green beans, dessert and drinks. Join us Saturday, Aug. 20, 6-7:30 p.m., 2700 Dolfield Dr., Richmond. Tickets can be purchased online only, <https://stedwardknights6546.square.site/>. No sales at the door! Benefiting Boys to Men Mentoring Virginia. Cost is \$30 per person or \$80 per immediate family of four.

Sacred Heart/St. Augustine School Reunion, Saturday, Aug. 27, 1400 Perry St., Richmond. Mass, 4 p.m., Sacred Heart Church. 5 p.m. potluck meal and fellowship in the old school building. Bring any pictures or items you have saved over the years. Tour the building to bring back memories. RSVP to Sharon (Craig) Pierce for details and potluck sign-up. spierce742@gmail.com or 804-279-0838 and leave a message. Volunteers are needed to help.

Norfolk Catholic High School

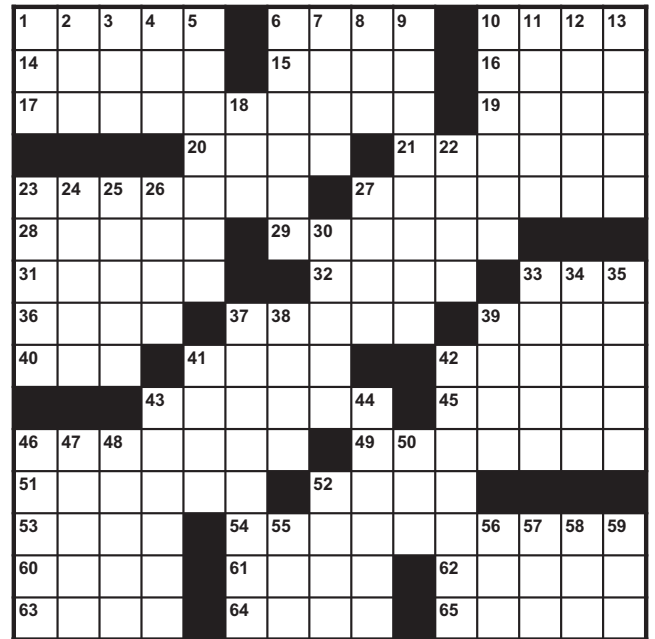
Classes of 1971 and 1972 are planning a joint reunion on Saturday, Oct. 8, at the DoubleTree Inn, 1500 N. Military Highway, Norfolk. The contact for Class of '72 is Carol Mishler (camishler@aol.com). The contact for Class of '71 is John Bladin (nchs7150@gmail.com or reelyjb@gmail.com). If you purchased tickets for the Class of '71 reunion attempt last year and have not gotten a refund, you are still registered. If you wish to attend under either year, please contact your class contact to RSVP and receive more details.

ACROSS

- 1 Commandment place
- 6 Church seats
- 10 Injury
- 14 Nut of an oak
- 15 Burn soother
- 16 Malarial fever
- 17 Type of prayer
- 19 US space agency
- 20 Where the Vatican is
- 21 Be emphatic
- 23 Small flute
- 27 Catholic singer who starred in "White Christmas"
- 28 Two-time loser to Ike
- 29 Split in the Church
- 31 Distributed cards
- 32 Pledge
- 33 Spanish hero
- 36 Tiered shelves
- 37 Destitute
- 39 Continental money
- 40 North American deer
- 41 Native Japanese
- 42 "On the Waterfront" character based on real-life priest, Fr. Corridan
- 43 ___ Uno
- 45 Disney's Little Mermaid
- 46 Soaks up
- 49 Section in the Bible
- 51 The Mass is one
- 52 God, in ancient Rome
- 53 Highly excited
- 54 Gospel writer
- 60 Adriatic wind
- 61 Trigonometric function
- 62 "Lord, ___ us to pray" (Lk 11:1)
- 63 "Let it stand"
- 64 Bound
- 65 Find the answer

DOWN

- 1 Abbr. for two OT books
- 2 Glass filler
- 3 This land is east of Eden
- 4 Jackie's "O"
- 5 At Mass, the entrance prayers or song
- 6 John was on this island
- 7 Writer Wiesel
- 8 Solicit
- 9 Old-age affliction
- 10 Horse-drawn vehicle
- 11 Once more
- 12 Charlotte's dessert?



www.wordgamesforcatholics.com

- 13 Full of substance
- 18 On-line co.
- 22 Snack
- 23 Title for Pio
- 24 Standard of perfection
- 25 Quick sharp sound
- 26 Horseshoe spike
- 27 African country
- 30 Sacre ___
- 33 Administrative arm of the Catholic Church
- 34 Like some vbs.
- 35 Catholic creator of Sherlock Holmes
- 37 Most agile
- 38 Hydrocarbon suffixes
- 39 Big rabbit features
- 41 Distinctive quality
- 42 Hunting dogs
- 43 Candy
- 44 Uncovered
- 46 Middle Easterners
- 47 Intolerant person
- 48 Grocery
- 50 Month of the Assumption (abbr.)
- 52 Northern European
- 55 Number of sacraments, in Roman numerals
- 56 There have been 13 popes with this name
- 57 Proverb suffix
- 58 ___1, papal license plate
- 59 Definite article

Puzzle answers on page 12

Three women join Dicastery for Bishops

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Ten days after saying he would name two women to the group that helps him choose bishops, Pope Francis appointed three women to the office. The Vatican announced July 13 that the pope had named 14 new members of the Dicastery for Bishops. For the first time ever, the members include women: Sister Raffaella Petrini, a Franciscan Sister of the Eucharist who is secretary-general of the office governing Vatican City State; French Salesian Sister Yvonne Reungoat, former superior general of the order; and Maria Lia Zervino, an Argentine

who is president of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations. The dicastery is led by Canadian Cardinal Marc Ouellet and is responsible for helping the pope choose bishops for Latin-rite dioceses outside of the Church's mission territories. Members meet twice a month to review dossiers submitted by Vatican nuncios about potential candidates and to vote on the names they recommend to the pope. Before Pope Francis' reform of the Roman Curia took effect in June, members of the dicastery were only cardinals and a few bishops.

Juan Manuel Sierra: El Papa nos anima a vivir la liturgia conociéndola y participando

El pasado 29 de junio, fue publicada la Carta Apostólica del Papa Francisco “Desiderio desideravi” sobre la formación litúrgica del Pueblo de Dios. En Vatican News, don Juan Manuel Sierra López, Profesor de liturgia en la Universidad Eclesiástica de San Damaso de Madrid señala que, esta Carta “nos pone en guardia contra el individualismo y el subjetivismo; y nos invita a descubrir la centralidad de Cristo. La liturgia es, en primer lugar, una acción de Cristo y de la Iglesia”.

RENATO MARTINEZ - CIUDAD DEL VATICANO

“Esta Carta Apostólica no es un documento disciplinar ni establece ninguna normativa. Desde el principio, intenta ofrecer una reflexión serena sobre la liturgia que la Iglesia celebra en continuidad con lo que Jesucristo mismo realizó en la Última Cena. De esa acción salvadora brota toda la liturgia de la Iglesia, que pastores y fieles deben conocer y celebrar”, lo dijo don Juan Manuel Sierra López, Profesor de liturgia en la Universidad Eclesiástica de San Damaso de Madrid, en el Instituto Teológico San Ildefonso y en la Facultad de San Isidoro de Sevilla, España, comentando la Carta Apostólica “Desiderio desideravi” del Papa Francisco, sobre la formación litúrgica del Pueblo de Dios, que fue publicada el pasado 29 de junio, en la solemnidad de los Santos Pedro y Pablo, Apóstoles.

**¿Cuál es la motivación de esta Carta?
¿Cómo surge este documento que el Papa ha ofrecido a toda la Iglesia?**

Este documento, esta Carta Apostólica, que es un regalo, es una preciosidad de documento. Tiene una presentación por parte del Dicasterio para el Culto Divino y la Disciplina de los Sacramentos donde se explica muy brevemente que se acoge en el documento, en la Carta Apostólica, las reflexiones realizadas en la Plenaria del Culto Divino, que fueron después presentadas al Papa, que el Papa reelabora y ofrece – en palabras del Culto Divino – “una meditación”. El Papa se refiere a “una reflexión sobre la formación” y podemos decir, sobre “la importancia de la liturgia en la vida de la Iglesia”.

La participación del pueblo de Dios en la liturgia

Se trata de un documento que, apoyándose en el Concilio Vaticano II, nos recuerda esa centralidad, esa importancia de la liturgia y un concepto que no es nuevo, pero se subraya en la “Sacrosanctum Concilium”, en la Constitución sobre la liturgia en el Vaticano II, que es esa participación. Participación que afecta lógicamente a todo el pueblo de Dios, a los Obispos, a los presbíteros, diáconos, a los consagrados y a todo fiel cristiano, que es precisamente a quienes se dirige esta Carta Apostólica “Desiderio desideravi” del Papa Francisco.

¿Cómo el Papa, a través de este documento, invita a fomentar la formación litúrgica de todo el pueblo de Dios?

El Papa insiste en esa formación litúrgica precisamente subrayando la importancia de la liturgia. Nos previene de algunos peligros que pueden asecharnos en la vivencia de la celebración de la liturgia. El Papa subraya que esta formación, que cuando hablamos de formación litúrgica, no se trata sólo de un



El obispo Knestout dirige la liturgia durante la Misa Crismal de 2022 en abril. (Foto/Michael Mickle)

concepto, ideas, un conocimiento digamos, “teórico-racional”, sino una verdadera vivencia, una auténtica experiencia. Es curioso como el Papa, y de aquí el título del documento, entronca con la celebración de la última Cena: “Ardientemente he deseado comer esta Pascua con vosotros, antes de padecer” (Lc 22,15). Son las palabras de Jesús recogidas en el Evangelio de San Lucas que sirven de título, de lema, a esta Carta Apostólica.

La liturgia es siempre una acción de Cristo y de la Iglesia

El Papa habla de toda la liturgia, pero se fija de una forma especial en la Eucaristía. Como decía, nos pone en guardia contra el subjetivismo, contra el individualismo. Subraya como la liturgia es siempre una acción de Cristo y de la Iglesia, y que debemos buscar esa unidad, esa armonía. En varios lugares de la Carta Apostólica, el Papa subraya – mirando a esa tarea realizada por el Concilio Vaticano II, por los Padres conciliares y en los años sucesivos de revitalización de la liturgia en el pueblo de Dios – y señala toda una serie de principios que el Concilio Vaticano II, en Sacrosanctum Concilium, establece para la liturgia. Dice el Papa de lo que no podemos prescindir y desde ahí en esa unidad, en esa armonía, el Papa pide que la liturgia no sea nunca motivo de confrontación.

Es una Carta de sentido pastoral y espiritual, no un texto normativo

Y aquí es donde entronca, de alguna manera, con la Carta dirigida a los Obispos que acompañaba el Motu proprio, “Traditionis custodes”, sobre la celebración de la Misa con el misal anterior al Concilio Vaticano II, que el Papa revisa un poco la normativa y la ajusta subrayando la responsabilidad que tienen los Obispos, porque en definitiva cada Obispo es el responsable de la liturgia en su diócesis, cada Obispo es Vicario de Cristo en su diócesis y toda la liturgia, como ya lo decía San Ignacio de Antioquia a principios del siglo II, subrayaba,

todo está girando en torno al Obispo.

“El documento, esta Carta Apostólica, es una Carta para animar a los fieles, es una Carta, podemos decir, de un sentido pastoral y espiritual. No es un texto normativo, no da normas, no precisa modos de actuar, sino que anima a todo el pueblo de Dios a vivir la liturgia conociéndola, comprendiéndola, amándola y participando de ella”

¿Podríamos decir que, una clave de lectura de Desiderio desideravi es la vivencia la celebración de la Santa Misa?

Sin duda ninguna, el Papa como decíamos se centra en la Eucaristía que es de donde brota toda la acción santificadora de Cristo por medio de la Iglesia. El Papa hace referencia en varias ocasiones al número séptimo de la Constitución Sacrosanctum Concilium, donde precisamente se subraya esa acción de Cristo a través de la Iglesia y se subraya esa vinculación que debe tener todo el pueblo de Dios en la celebración litúrgica, que es acción de Cristo por medio de la Iglesia. Pero que nos implica a todos los bautizados, a todos los miembros del pueblo de Dios. Es verdad, que el Papa se refiere a toda la liturgia y cuando habla ella desde el título de la formación litúrgica del pueblo de Dios no queda circunscrito, no queda de alguna forma reducido a la Eucaristía, al sacrificio de la Misa.

La Iglesia, la nueva Eva, Madre de los que viven

Es verdad, que es de la Misa, del sacrificio de Cristo celebrado en la Eucaristía de donde brota todo, porque en la Santa Misa lo que estamos celebrando es el sacrificio de Cristo y esa imagen que el apóstol San Juan en su Evangelio recoge y el Papa se hace también eco de ello, cuando de Cristo muerto en la cruz, con la lanza al traspasar el pecho del Señor “brotan agua y sangre”, dice el evangelista. Los Padres de la Iglesia, los autores espirituales y la misma liturgia, ven en este momento un paralelismo entre la creación de Adán, de cuyo costado sale Eva, la madre de los que viven y digamos la creación que se produce desde la Cruz de la nueva Eva, de la Iglesia, Madre de los que viven. Todo esto es muy importante y es el fundamento de esa acción de la Iglesia.

¿Podría decirnos que perspectivas litúrgicas emergen de este documento? Y ¿Cómo se puede ayudar al pueblo de Dios a redescubrir la belleza de la celebración cristiana?

El tema también lo aborda el Papa Francisco cuando se refiere a la formación para la liturgia y la formación desde la liturgia o la liturgia que forma. Ya la celebración adecuada tanto por parte del que preside la celebración sea Obispo, sea sacerdote o diácono, como del pueblo de Dios, eso ya nos va formando, si hay una disposición adecuada. Al mismo tiempo, debemos en esa comprensión de los textos, en esa meditación de las oraciones, de las lecturas y en la medida de lo posible también a través de las parroquias, de los grupos cristianos, de la misma catequesis, ir conociendo cada vez mejor esa liturgia que es muestra, que nos pertenece. El campo de la formación litúrgica, podemos decir, es ilimitado, hay que cuidarlo, tenemos que ilusionarnos. El Papa que se refiere al domingo, al año litúrgico, insiste en que la Misa antes que una obligación es un gran regalo, toda la liturgia es un regalo de Dios en Jesucristo, una acción del Espíritu Santo y debemos vivir y transmitir.

‘Doing what the Church is teaching’

With prayer, persistence, couple brings ‘son’ home from Ukraine

JOHN SHAUGHNESSY
Catholic News Service

INDIANAPOLIS — The phone call was a parent’s nightmare, waking Thomas Wright at 3 a.m. in Indianapolis.

As Wright heard the fear in the voice of the young person calling from Ukraine — someone he regards as a son — he also heard explosions in the background as the Russians began their invasion of the country in February.

“I’m in a panic because there’s nothing you can do,” Wright recalled about that phone call from then-19-year-old Anton Bezborodov. “It’s the most helpless feeling in the world.”

Yet that helpless feeling soon turned into a plan of action for Thomas and his wife, Beth.

Members of St. John the Evangelist Parish in Indianapolis, they immediately sent a request for prayers for Anton’s safety to their friends and to the extended family that they have created by hosting 44 foreign exchange students from a dozen countries over the past 23 years.

As the prayers poured forth, so did the offers to do whatever could be done to help Anton escape the war and make it to the one place he has considered as his true home — with the Wrights in Indianapolis.

‘This is our boy’

Growing up in an orphanage in Ukraine, Anton had never had anyone he could truly count on in life. But that all changed when, at age 15, he spent four weeks over Christmas in 2017 with the Wrights in their Indianapolis home — all part of an international program to give orphans in Ukraine an opportunity to spend the holidays with an American family.

When Beth first saw a photograph of Anton before his arrival, it melted her heart so much that she thought, “Oh, Jesus, this is our boy.” And during the four weeks with the Wrights, Anton had such a feeling of being at home that he started calling them Mom and Dad.

“We pray about the kids that we’re going to accept as exchange students,” Thomas told *The Criterion*, newspaper of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. “God puts them in our house, and we soon become aware of why they’re here and why God chose them to be with us.

“We’re interacting with them on a deeper family level, and we’re helping them to understand God better. We look at it as a way we do ministry.”

Beth nodded and added, “This is exactly what the Catholic Church is teaching, that we are cooperating with God through his work. God doesn’t need our work, but he wants us to participate with him in this work.”

Universal effort

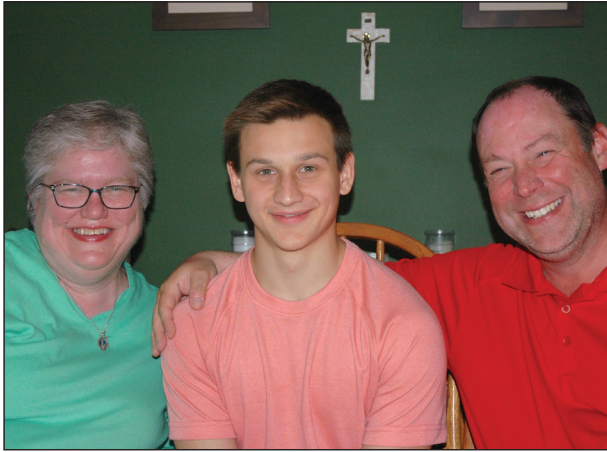
For the Wrights, doing God’s work includes building a family with the young people they invite into their home.

Still, there was something different about their relationship with Anton. The power of that connection was so strong that the Wrights wanted to adopt him, but Ukrainian law prevented that possibility because of Anton’s age, Thomas said.

So the Wrights have spent the past five years supporting Anton economically and emotionally as he continued his life in Ukraine, paying for his college expenses and phoning him on a regular basis.

Then came that early morning phone call with Anton asking for help against a background of explosions in the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv.

As the Wrights sent a request around the



Anton Bezborodov, center, with Beth and Thomas Wright, members of St. John the Evangelist Parish, Indianapolis. (CNS photo/John Shaughnessy, *The Criterion*)

world for prayers for Anton’s safety, they also received numerous offers to help him escape.

A parishioner from St. John shared that she has family in Poland, and if he could make it there, he could stay with them. And the foreign exchange students from Europe who had stayed with the Wrights told them that Anton could come to their homes.

The problem was getting out of Ukraine. Anton tried buses. He tried trains, all without success. In desperation, after a few weeks, Anton joined a group of about 10 others in making an all-night hike through a forest and across a frozen river, the cold seeping into his body as they crossed into Romania.

From there, the parent of an exchange student in Hungary met Anton and brought him to the family’s home there. By then, it was late March, a time when Thomas was on spring break from his job as an orchestra teacher at Southport High School.

“I said, ‘Son, do you need me to come there?’” Thomas recalled. “He said, ‘I want you here.’ He wanted Dad there. I told Beth I had to go.”

‘This guy knows a guy...’

During that time together in Hungary, the family that had welcomed Anton into their home advised he would be safer in Germany, so Anton and Thomas traveled there to stay with the family of another exchange student who had lived with the Wrights in 2021.

“There was a brief, distant hope I could bring him home with me,” Thomas said about unsuccessful efforts to get help from the U.S. Embassy there. “It hurt to leave him.”

And that’s where the journey seemed to be ending for Anton until Thomas heard about another possibility — a possibility that he believes shows “how the body of Christ works.”

“I’m in a Bible study at Southport High,” Thomas said. “One of my colleagues in the Bible study tells me his best man from his wedding knows a guy from this Lutheran ministry who knows a guy in San Diego who is helping Ukrainians come through the Mexican border.”

Thomas obtained the information and sent it to Anton. On Easter Sunday, Anton messaged Thomas saying, “I want to go to Mexico now!”

The Wrights arranged a flight for him. Anton arrived in Mexico on the Thursday after Easter and by that Friday morning, he was going through the immigration process at the United States border with his request for “humanitarian parole.”

When he was asked if he knew anyone living in the United States, Anton wrote, “Thomas Wright.” When he was asked his relationship to Thomas, he wrote, “Host dad.” A short time later,

he phoned Thomas, who was teaching a class.

“I saw it was Anton calling,” Thomas said, the emotion overwhelming him again. “My whole class is living through all this with me. They got so quiet. Anton said, ‘Hi, Dad, I’m in America, and I want to come home.’”

“Those were the best words I ever heard,” Thomas said. “My students started applauding. They were so happy.”

God’s plan at work

Anton boarded a plane from San Diego that arrived in Indianapolis April 22.

“I was really impressed that I could go anywhere and people were willing to help me and take me in,” Anton said.

Beth looked at Anton and remarked: “What we wanted was to never send him back in the first place. But God has plans beyond our own. God works in ways we don’t necessarily expect, but he’s always working. He builds our family, and that absolutely impacted how this all worked out.”

“Every day, Christians all over the world were praying for us to bring him home,” Thomas said, looking at Anton. “Christians opened up their homes for him. These were the connections that only the Holy Spirit makes possible through the body of Christ.”

Missionaries

Continued from Page 3

can spot their lace-less shoes and potentially kidnap them for ransom.

To combat this, CMS provides shoelaces and also works with different organizations to battle human trafficking and advocate for refugees’ rights. No matter the mission, needs abound.

Father Comboni held many titles in his life, from priest, to the first bishop of Central Africa, to saint when he was canonized in 2003 by Pope St. John Paul II. But he remained forever a missionary, proclaiming, “Our life, a Missionary’s life, is a combination of grief and enjoyment, exhaustion and hope, suffering and consolation. We work with our hands and our heads; we travel on foot and in canoes. We study, we sweat, we suffer, we rejoice. This is all that Providence wants of us.” A century and a half later, his thousands of missionaries are still bringing light to the world’s darkest corners.

Editor’s note: For further information about the Comboni Missionary Sisters, visit <https://combonimissionaries.org>.

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R	I	T	U	A	L		D	E	U	S				
A	G	O	G		E	V	A	N	G	E	L	I	S	T
B	O	R	A		S	I	N	E		T	E	A	C	H
S	T	E	T		T	I	E	D		S	O	L	V	E