Los Angeles, Calif., Mar 19 (CNA) - The writers and co-directors of the upcoming film "Unplanned" have spoken of how they prepared for a "spiritual battle" to make the pro-life film in the hopes that it will change hearts and minds through its groundbreaking depiction of the abortion process.

"We, from the beginning, knew that it would be a spiritual battle, spiritual warfare. It was prophesied over us that this is not a normal movie," co-director Cary Solomon told CNA in an interview following a screening for press on March 18.

"Unplanned" dramatizes the truth-life account of Planned Parenthood clinic director Abby Johnson's decision to leave the organization and become a pro-life campaigner.

Solomon and co-director Chuck Konzelman told CNA that they arranged for a priest to exorcise the set, and bless the cast and props. "We tried to do Mass and adoration as much as we could," said Solomon. For the Evangelical Christians involved in making the film, similar spiritual guidance was offered.

Despite anticipating the usual stresses of the pro-life cause, Solomon admitted they had "probably 15 accidents where people or family members of people who worked on the movie, were in a car crash, and the person would just walk away," said Solomon.

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Renewing the Baptismal Covenant

Sunday, April 21, Easter Sunday, announces and celebrates the central mystery of our Catholic Faith, the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We still have a few weeks left of Lent before we come to Easter but it is necessary for us, throughout Lent, to keep our eyes fixed on the goal, namely walking with Jesus in His suffering so that we might also share in His glorious Resurrection. In truth, those who have already been baptized have been joined to this Resurrection of Jesus in a most wonderful and powerful sacramental way. Those who are preparing and studying to be Baptized or who are making a Profession of Faith at the Easter Vigil are reminded by way of the Rites of Election, celebrated this year at Saint Mary’s in Arcata and at the Cathedral in Santa Rosa, that Lent is a time of preparation for the reception of Baptism or the making of a Profession of Faith for entry into the Catholic Church.

The people from across the Diocese who are involved in that preparation recognize that they are preparing for the making or the Renewing of a Baptismal Covenant with God Himself. This same attitude can and perhaps should be adopted by all of us. One of the central actions on the part of the Christian faithful during the Easter Vigil and at all Masses on Easter Sunday is the Renewal of Baptismal Promises. At the Easter Masses this Renewal replaces the usual Profession of Faith. We often hear that Lent is a time of preparation for Easter and this is certainly true. It is a time to enter again into the Mystery of our Salvation which is accomplished by Jesus on the Cross, in the Tomb and upon His Rising from the dead. Each year, in the Annual Liturgical Cycle of the Church, we enter into this more intense period of remembering and paying closer attention to the sufferings of Christ throughout Lent without coming to a deeper, more heartfelt, more deeply binding love for the One who gave Himself for us.

Thus, our Lenten work becomes a preparation for our Easter Renewal of Baptism. This Annual Renewal of Baptismal Promises is something very serious and it calls for our serious attention. The Promises entail both a rejection of Satan and an affirmation of basic faith. “Do you reject Satan?” This is the first question. We respond automatically, “I do.” Yet, it is a serious question and demands more than an automatic answer. “And all his works?” This is the next question. It calls for prayer and reflection in advance. “And all his empty promises?” This is the third question and it likewise is an invitation to affirm our rejection of all things separated from God. If the response is simply automatic, without an underlying heart, then we can hear echoes of the Old Testament charge, “This people pays me lip service but their hearts are far from me” (Isaiah 29:13). This occasion of Renewal, if it is to be a moment of grace, must involve ‘conversion’ and this requires preparation. The whole of Lent is, in this sense, a preparation for our Renewal of Baptismal Promises and for Reconciliation to our Baptism.

The rejection of the one who is not God is the first part of the Baptismal Promises. The second part is the Profession of Faith and is comprised of a three- or Trinitarian Profession. We are asked if we believe in God, the Father almighty, in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord and in the Holy Spirit. Our decisive answer to each, which must be more than automatic, is “I do.” Joined to the question of belief in the Holy Spirit is a list of other tenets of our Faith which are also included in our weekly Creed. Thus we hear, “Do you believe in the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life ever-lasting?” Our whole Lenten observance and our participation in Holy Mass throughout the year, our commitment to live a life of faith are to be the direct manifestation of this profession of faith.

We are reminded of the citation from Pope Emeritus Benedict last month: we set our hearts on the “great hope that surpasses everything else”—“life everlasting.”
Pope Francis: Marriage and Family Have ‘An Essential Mission’

By Hannah Brockhaus

Loreto, Italy, Mar 25 (CNA) - On the Solemnity of the Annunciation, Pope Francis emphasized the importance of family and marriage for society. He also called the Virgin Mary a model for every vocation.

“It is necessary to rediscover the plan drawn by God for the family, to reaffirm its greatness and irreplaceability in the service of life and society,” the pope said March 25, during a visit to the Shrine of the Holy House in Loreto, Italy.

The Shrine of the Holy House preserves the building where tradition holds the Virgin Mary was born, raised, and greeted by the Angel Gabriel at the Annunciation. Historic documentation shows that the Holy House was brought from Palestine to Italy in the 13th century. The Holy House also holds the statue of Our Lady of Loreto.

The Holy House of Mary is the “home of the family,” Pope Francis said during his visit, noting that “in the delicate situation of today’s world, the family founded on marriage between a man and a woman takes on an importance and an essential mission.”

He said the Holy House is also the home of the young, “because here the Virgin Mary, the young woman full of grace, continues to speak to the new generations, accompanying each one in the search for his vocation.”

“Mary is the model of every vocation and the inspirer of every vocation ministry,” he continued. “Young people who are looking for, or wondering about their future, can find in Mary She who helps them to discern God’s plan for themselves and the strength to adhere to it.”

Mary was a daughter, a betrothed, a bride, and a mother, he noted, and “for this reason, every family, in its different components, finds a refuge here…” in the Holy House.

The pope added that the domestic experience of Mary shows that pastoral care of the family and of young people should not be kept separate, but “must walk closely together,” because young people are highly impacted by their experience of family in their formative years.

During the day-long visit to Loreto, Pope Francis celebrated Mass inside the Holy House, gave a speech and led those present in praying the Angelus.

“The Mother of God does not cease to obtain spiritual benefits in those who, with faith and devotion, come here to pause in prayer,” he said about the Holy House.

After Mass, the pope signed the post-synodal exhortation written following October 2018’s Synod of Bishops on young people, faith, and vocational discernment. The document, which is addressed to the young people of the Church, is titled Christus vivit (“Christ lives”) and will be published April 2.

He also expressed the desire for John Paul II youth centers to be “re launched” throughout Italy and around the world and asked the friars to extend the opening hours of the Basilica of the Holy House into the late evening and early night, when groups of young pilgrims are present, so that the place may be available for prayer and vocational discernment.

The pope said: “I think of Loreto as a privileged place where young people can come in search of their vocation, at Mary’s school!”

At the Annunciation, Mary demonstrated the steps one should take to respond to God’s call of vocation: listening to the Word of God, discernment, and decision, he said.

First, Mary listened to the message of the Angel Gabriel. And in response to what the Angel said, she asked, “how can this be?” The pope explained that Mary’s question did not come from a lack of faith, but from a deepening discernment of the Lord’s will and her cooperation in it.

And finally, Mary gives her “yes,” he said, “the ‘yes’ of full trust and total availability to the will of God.”

“There is a need for simple and wise people, humble and courageous, poor and generous. In short, people who, at Mary’s school, welcome the Gospel without reserve in their lives,” Pope Francis said.

“Thus, through the holiness of the people of God, testimonies of holiness in every state of life will continue to spread in Italy, in Europe and in the world, to renew the Church and animate society with the leaven of the Kingdom of God.”

April 23: St. George
(Spiritual Warfare, cont. from page 1)

Almost killed her, " said Solomon. Konzelman agreed, and added that the set of "Unplanned" was "the calmest set [he's] ever been on."

"There was no screaming, there was no tension—the average day would have no incident," said Konzelman. "That's just not normal in filmmaking."

Despite the relative calm on set, other incidents plagued the cast and crew, as well as their families. Thankfully, nobody was seriously hurt, but there have been several close calls.

"We've probably had 15 accidents where people or family members of people who worked on the movie, were in a car crash, [...] and the person would just walk away," said Solomon.

"They've all been crazy violent," he explained. One person survived a bike accident that destroyed her helmet, and a producer's car was split in half after being t-boned.

Lead actress Ashley Bratcher, who plays the role of Abby Johnson, survived a near death-car accident when she was stuck on the highway, in their guidelines. "Unplanned" was the first R-rated film to be distributed by Pure Flix, a Christian movie production company.

The co-directors previously told CNA that they would not be challenging the rating, which they feared was motivated by the movie's political message. "No one's ever seen [a graphic presentation of abortion] before. It's been very carefully and very studiously avoided by the [entertainment] industry," Konzelman said.

He explained to CNA that Planned Parenthood portrays abortion, which was something he had not previously seen or thought about. The movie "showed what we [as a society] never wanted to see," Solomon's father told him. "And now when you know, you can't un-know!" Unplanned will be released in theatres nationwide on March 29. The film is rated R due to disturbing images and violence.

Unplanned is currently showing at the Century Napa Valley and XD Theater.

New Catholics!

There will be 76 new Catholics received into the Church at the Easter Vigil this year. Of that number, 54 are Catechumens and 22 are Candidates for Full Communion with the Catholic Church. Let us rejoice with our newly anointed brother and sister Catholics, and offer prayers for the deepening of the wonderful mysteries of our Faith in their hearts!

A God-Is Retreat for baptized adult Catholics preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation was held Sat. Feb. 23, at Cardinal Neman High School in Santa Rosa. About 60 participants attended.

There were two Rite of Election ceremonies with Bishop Vasa. The first was held Saturday, March 9, at St. Mary's Church in Arcata. The second was held Sunday, March 10, at St. Eugene's Cathedral.

Bishop Vasa fellowships with parishioners of St. Mary's, Arcata at the reception for Rite of Election.

(Discrete Mercy, cont. from page 1)

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Detroit, Mich., Mar 25 (CNA) - Maybe it was the classic sunglasses, the skinny jeans or the flocculent mustache. Maybe it was the vintage-style religious art, the men in embellished uniforms, or what looks like incense rising from the streets.

Whatever it was, a photo of a religious procession with a circa-1940s aesthetic recently fascinated Catholics, who shared it on social media and other places around the internet.

Except the photo of a St. Joseph’s procession on the streets of Detroit wasn’t taken in 1945. It was taken last week.

“I guess what really makes it 'epic' in today’s terms is the steam from the city that...looks like holy incense,” said Canon Michael Stein, ICRSS, rector of St. Joseph’s Oratory in Detroit, which sponsored the procession.

“We dubbed it ‘city incense,” he said of steam that can be seen rising up from the street in the already-iconic photo.

Canon Stein is a member of the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest, a Roman Catholic society of apostolic life with an emphasis on the traditional Latin Mass. The Institute was invited to St. Joseph’s Church in Detroit in 2016 to revive what was then a struggling Church community.

(What is a “canon,” you ask? “In layman’s terms, if you take a monk on the one hand, and a diocesan priest on the other, and smoosh them together, you get a canon,” Canon Stein said.)

“When there was every material reason to shut it down (not enough funds, not enough faithful, a crumbling building), we're very grateful that Bishop Vigneron had a much grander vision (for the parish),” Stein told CNA.

“He created a win-win situation by unmerging St. Joseph’s (from a cluster of three parishes), making it its own parish within the archdiocese, and then inviting the Institute of Christ the King to come live here and breathe daily parish life back into it from scratch, and that’s exactly what we’ve done for the past two years,” he said.

One very visible sign of that new life in the parish is the beautiful St. Joseph’s procession, which the Institute has organized since 2017.

The appeal of the photo, and of the procession (which this year included 500 people), goes deeper than aesthetics, Stein said.

“I think it’s safe to say there’s a profound theological and spiritual reason why that photo resonates so much with our hearts,” he said.

“We are the religion of the Incarnation. God became man, the invisible God became visible, he sanctified the material world and elevated these visible, tangible signs to communicate invisible graces and to convey eternal truths.”

“This is my parish; this is what we do,” said Daniel Egan told The Detroit Catholic about the procession.

“This is a perennial St. Joseph Day tradition. St. Joseph Parish has been here for almost 150 years, so this isn’t new to this area. Maybe it fell out of practice for the last 30, 40 years, but we are showing we are Catholic, as we are called to,” he said.

“As Catholics, we’re told to live our faith in season and out of season, in the public square and in private, and that includes the city streets. If we’re not Catholic out there, we are truly failing to be authentically Christian.”

The photo of the procession includes the Knights of St. John in full uniform (a Catholic charitable organization with a very long history), as well as parish vicar Canon Adrian Sequeira, ICRSS, leading the procession in full choir habit, which is used when the order chants the Liturgy of the Hours together.

The spots of blue throughout the photo symbolize the order’s total consecration to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Stein said.

St. Joseph speaks to the hearts of today as a gentle and loving man and father and worker, Stein told CNA.

Part of the homily from the feast day, he said, explained that God sends saints for the times - either holy people of the time who are witnessing to the Gospel, or saints of old who are re-presented and raised up as intercessors for the times.

“It only takes a quick glance around the world to see a fatherless society, and to see either a slothful or workaholic society, or a lack of an appropriate understanding of manliness,” Stein said.

“It’s neither brute nor effeminate, it’s faithful, it’s steadfast, it’s courageous and gentle. And we find all those things in St. Joseph, so I think that’s another part of the power of that picture.”

The procession, which traveled for less than a mile, stopped rush-hour traffic in the city, with the collaboration of Detroit police. It travelled to the Eastern Market, an iconic makers market in Detroit that has remained in the city since the 1800s, where workers can sell their wares and fathers can support their families - two things of which St. Joseph is the patron, Stein noted.

“So all the workers got to see their patron processing through the streets, whether they knew it or not,” he said.

The procession was part of numerous events celebrating St. Joseph that took place in both St. Joseph’s parish and throughout the archdiocese. In addition to the procession, St. Joseph’s parish had three Masses, an Italian dinner, and a running litany of other activities and devotions throughout the day.

Other Detroit parishes had St. Joseph’s Masses and dinners, including San Francesco Parish, which held a Mass, Italian dinner and St. Joseph’s play, and Holy Family Parish, which held an Italian-language Mass.

Beyond being a photogenic opportunity, Stein noted, the procession and all of the festivities on the feast of St. Joseph are the fruit of a lively spiritual and liturgical life.

(see Vintage Procession, page 6)
Grandmother’s Prayer Closet Survives Powerful Tornado That Flattened Home, Killed Many

By Leonardo Blair, March 26, (Christian Post Reporter)

An Alabama grandmother who emerged from the rubble of her home praising God after it was flattened by a powerful tornado earlier this month, wasn’t the only thing that survived. The brick walls around 72-year-old Earnestine Reese’s prayer closet survived too.

The story of Reese’s prayer closet was first highlighted in a Facebook post by Jason Smith just over a week ago.

“I thank the Lord. You tell God, ‘Thank you, God.’ You hear me? You hear me? Tell God thank you. Tell God thank you. ‘Reese tells her grandson.

“I thank the Lord. You tell God, ‘Thank you, God.’ You hear me? You hear me? Tell God thank you. Tell God thank you,” Reese tells her grandson.

“My mom was buried under the debris. As soon as they brought her out of the debris, her first response was ‘tell the Lord thank you.’ Someone said, ‘the trailer is gone.’ She said, ‘the house is gone too. Tell the Lord thank you,'” Frazier said.

“We lost seven family members, 15 people on this street. Every time the enemy tried to bring something into my mind I keep thinking, ‘tell the Lord thank you.’ And that’s what I’m gonna do. I’m gonna keep telling God thank you because I trust Him and I’m gonna keep telling God thank you. Thank you for the storm, thank you for the recovery, thank you for the joy of the Holy Ghost. Thank you God. I will not forget what he’s done for me. I will not forget. We will rebuild, we will recover, [but] in all of these things, we will thank God. We will thank God,” she said.

Reese's other daughter, Lashawn Wilson, told WHNT that when the tornado hit, her mother gripped tightly to her faith.

“We were like dominoes on top of each other. My son was on top of me. He said, ‘Mom I don’t want to die. I don’t want to die.’ And I said ‘Son, just pray your way through,’ Wilson said.

‘She’s in good spirits as you can see in the video,” she said of her mother. “She’s been strong throughout it all. Even in the middle of the devastation she has maintained her faith.”

“It shows that we’re alive,” Stein said. “These things are the fruit of a daily sacramental life, these things are the fruit of a reverent liturgy, and the fruit of a solid catechesis. They’re the fruit of our young adults being committed...Detroit as a city is coming back, and a lot of millennials are staying after college to get their first career jobs here.”

To fill the needs of an increasing number of young people, St. Joseph’s offers teenage catechesis and young adult groups, Stein said. The parish also has daily Mass and confession, a schola choir, and active volunteer groups, among other ministries. Within just two years, it’s become a hub for millennials in the Archdiocese, he noted.

“We are predominantly young,” Stein said, and young people are hungry for an incarnational faith.

“We are body and soul, all these spiritual truths are meant to be communicated through our senses. We get to see our faith, hear our faith, taste our faith, etc., and that just appeals to us so much,” he said.

“Truth needs to shine in beauty...we’re not angels, we’re not just pure intelligences, we need to see, touch, hear; and that’s something the traditional liturgy has always done. That’s something that a reverent Mass or procession can do, these visible signs that the Church has used throughout her history to excite devotion and promote devotion.”

Letters Policy

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Name, hometown, and daytime phone number for verification required. Short letters only, no more than 150 words. Letters may be edited for clarity or space.

NOTE: Views of correspondents do not necessarily reflect those of this publication.

www.srdioceses.org
April is Child Abuse Awareness Month. The last few months in our diocese and the last few issues have reminded us of the terrible evil perpetrated on innocent children by those who should have been able to trust. This month, I want to pray the Rosary for Healing developed by the Secretariat for Child and Youth Protection at the USCCB. This rosary incorporates meditations for healing for victims of abuse on each of the mysteries. You can find a link to the rosary on our diocesan web site—http://srdiocese.org/content/child-and-youth-protection. What an amazing thing to have the people of the Diocese of Santa Rosa pray this rosary together during this month of April! If you don’t want to pray the rosary, please consider this portion of the rosary—this prayer. It can also be said for any victim of child abuse, young or old, that they may find healing and peace. Won’t you join me?

A Prayer for Healing for Victims of Child Abuse

God of endless love, ever caring, ever strong, always present, always just: You gave your only Son to save us by the blood of his cross.

Gentle Jesus, shepherd of peace, join to your own suffering the pain of all who have been hurt in body, mind, and spirit by those who betrayed the trust placed in them.

Hear our cries as we agonize over the harm done to our brothers and sisters. Breathe wisdom into our prayers, soothe restless hearts with hope, steady shaken spirits with faith: Show us the way to justice and wholeness, enlightened by truth and enfolded in your mercy.

Holy Spirit, comforter of hearts, heal your people’s wounds and transform our brokenness. Grant us courage and wisdom, humility and grace, so that we may act with justice and find peace in you.

We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

‘The Shenanigans’ at Mother Angelica’s first vows

If you picture a nun’s first profession of vows, you probably picture a serene, peaceful affair with the sisters singing harmoniously and everything running joyfully and smoothly.

However, the day of Mother Angelica’s first vows was anything but.

Outside, a blizzard spit snow and ice, snarling roads and delaying the guests and the presiding bishop, James McFadden.

Inside, different storms were brewing.

As then-Sister Angelica knelt behind the grille, trying to pray before taking her vows, the organist and the choir director, Sr. Mary of the Cross (with whom Sr. Angelica had sparred in the past), began arguing about musical technique, within earshot of the already-arrived guests.

As the incident is recalled in her biography:

Voices slowly escalated. Suddenly the two nuns were at each other: the organist refusing to play, Mary of the Cross threatening to throw her into the snow if she didn’t.

“And I’m sitting there trying to re-collect myself for my vows,” Mother Angelica recalled. “The people must have thought we were nuts.”

Then came the bug, scampering across the wooden floor in front of the sisters.

Mary of the Cross rose up, lifted the kneeler with both hands, and pounded it on the ground, attempting to annihilate the insect. Like a madwoman with a jackhammer, she repeatedly wielded the prie-dieu (kneeler), hurling it and herself at the crawler. The organist, thinking the display an underhanded critique of her playing, pounded the keys all the harder.

Sister Angelica could not believe what she termed “the shenanigans.” Then the bishop walked in.

Wet and cold from walking several blocks where he had to leave his stalled car, Bishop McFadden

(see Shenanigans, page 8)

Scottish Bishops Warn Against Characterizing Religious Beliefs as ‘Hate Speech’

Scotland, Mar 26 (CNA) The Catholic Bishops Conference of Scotland is warning against the government’s restriction of free speech, amid fears that the Church’s stance on marriage and sexuality could make Catholics susceptible to hate crime allegations.

“Care must be taken to allow room for debate and a robust exchange of views, ensuring that ‘hate’ doesn’t include the kind of ordinary discourse where people reasonably hold divergent views,” reads the bishop’s statement submitted to the Scottish Government’s consultation on hate crimes.

“The fundamental right to freedom of expression, and the right of an individual to hold and express opinions, even if they are considered by some to be controversial or unwelcome must be upheld.”

This comes amid a national independent review of Scotland’s hate crime legislation, commissioned by the Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs, and released in May 2018.

“In a climate of heightened sensitivity there is a very real danger that expressing or even holding individual or collective opinions or beliefs will become a hate crime,” Horan said.

“We must guard against this and ensure freedom of expression, thought, conscience and religion are protected.”

Scotland has experienced significant sectarian division since the Scottish Reformation of the 16th century, which led to the formation of the Church of Scotland, an ecclesial community in the Calvinist and Presbyterian tradition which is the country’s largest religious community.

Sectarianism and crimes motivated by anti-Catholicism have been on the rise in Scotland in recent years, and Catholics in Scotland are increasingly concerned that the government could consider their faith “hate speech,” according to local reports.

The Scottish government launched a campaign last year with posters addressed to ‘bigots, disablists, homophobes, racists, and transphobes’ across the country, saying that anyone engaging in “hate speech” will be reported to police.

The Scottish Catholic Observer reports that docu- (see Hate Speech, page 10)
US Catholics’ Awareness of Christian Persecution Increasing

Washington D.C., Mar 21 (CNA) - Nearly half of American Catholics say global persecution of Christians is "very severe," a 16 percent increase from a year ago, according to a new survey commissioned by the papal charity Aid to the Church in Need (ACN).

Despite this increase in awareness, the American Catholics surveyed ranked human trafficking, poverty and the refugee crisis as more urgent problems than the global persecution of Christians, the study says.

"It is heartening to see that U.S. Catholics have a growing awareness of and concern about the persecution of Christians," said George Marlin, chairman of ACN-USA, in a March 19 statement.

"It is telling that human trafficking, poverty and the refugee crisis get more attention from U.S. Catholics than the persecution of Christians," he added, saying that the survey "strongly suggests that U.S. Catholic Church, both at the parish and diocesan levels, should get more engaged with the global persecution of Christians around the world."

The study examined the extent to which American Catholics are aware of the persecution of Christians around the world; the countries and regions where they consider Christians to be most severely persecuted; specific measures and policies they want the U.S. and other Western governments to pursue to help and protect persecuted Christians; the extent to which they feel that the pope, their bishops and their parishes are prioritizing the persecution of Christians; and actions they believe they can and should take themselves.

Only 19 percent of the survey's respondents said their parish is very involved with the issue of global persecution of Christians, down from 37 percent a year ago. In addition, 22 percent said they are unsure about their parish's involvement in this area.

Similarly, only 24 percent of U.S. Catholics believe their bishop is "very engaged" with the issue of Christian persecution, though over half say they think Pope Francis is "very engaged" with this issue.

When asked what they themselves should do to help persecuted Christians around the world, American Catholics ranked prayer highest, followed by raising awareness at the parish level; donating to agencies that work to support persecuted Christians; and contacting their members of Congress. However, the report found that almost half of U.S. Catholics have not donated in the past year to an organization that helps persecuted Christians.

Regarding potential policies by the U.S. and other Western governments to deter the persecution of Christians, respondents ranked diplomatic pressure as most important, followed by economic sanctions; granting victims of persecution emergency asylum; and supporting persecuted Christian communities financially.

U.S. Catholics are least in favor of military intervention and the arming and training of persecuted Christians, but more than 60 percent of U.S. Catholics say the Church must play a hands-on role in providing emergency and humanitarian aid to persecuted Christians around the world.

The study's release comes amid increased persecution of Christians in many countries worldwide. ACN released a report last November that highlights 38 nations with significant religious freedom violations, and in more than half of those countries, conditions for religious minorities have deteriorated since 2016.

Some notable countries where persecution of Christians is taking place include China, where the Communist government is brutally cracking down on the practice of religion despite a September 2018 provisional deal with the Vatican meant to ease tensions between the faithful "underground" Church and the state-sponsored Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association, the report said.

In other countries including North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Eritrea, "the situation [for religious minorities] was already so bad, it could scarcely get any worse," it added.

Islamic extremism, fueled by conflict between Sunni and Shia Islam, accounted for the persecution faced by minorities in 22 of the 38 countries highlighted.

Interreligious conflict has been especially acute in Nigeria of late, where clashes between Christian and Muslim herdsmen have killed at least 120 people in the past few weeks, and has claimed thousands of lives in recent years, according to local reports.

(Shenanigans, cont. from page 7)

requested a fresh pair of socks, which Sr. Mary of the Cross sent Sister Angelica to get.

When it came time to place the profession ring on Sr. Angelica's fingers, the bishop couldn't fit it past her knuckle—her hand was swollen from a shower handle in the convent that had crumbled and cut her hand several days prior.

"With everything going on there, I'm thinking, Oh Jesus doesn't love me. You know?...I mean, it was a real spiritual experience!" Mother Angelica said. "But that's the way God works with me. As I look back, before anything big that was coming, something happened to me."

Despite "the shenanigans" of the day, Sr. Angelica took her vows seriously, writing in a letter to her mother that "the espoused" and "royal couple" (herself and Jesus) "wished to express their gratitude to their friend and member of their personal court...The spouse has asked the Bridegroom to fill you with his peace and consolation."

She signed the letter: "Jesus and Angelica."

Mother Mary Angelica of the Annunciation, foundress of EWTN, died on March 27, 2016 after a lengthy struggle with the aftereffects of a stroke. She was 92 years old.

EWTN Global Catholic Network was launched by Mother Angelica in 1981. The largest religious media network in the world, it reaches more than 275 million television households in more than 145 countries and territories.

In addition to television channels in multiple languages, EWTN platforms include radio services through shortwave and satellite radio, SIRIUS/XM, iHeart Radio, and over 500 AM & FM affiliates. EWTN publishes the National Catholic Register, operates a religious goods catalogue, and in 2015 formed EWTN Publishing in a joint venture with Sophia Institute Press. Catholic News Agency is also part of the EWTN family.
So... how is your Lent going? We are almost to Easter, the celebration of Jesus conquering death, rising from the dead, and opening the gates of heaven for all of us who believe in Him and follow in His way. But His way is challenging when you really put your heart into it and live daily your Catholic faith. Lent is a time to make those little improvements in ourselves to prepare for meeting Christ face to face. So again, how is Lent going for you? Will you finish Lent strong, facing the challenge of becoming closer to God, or have you slipped a bit?

As we end Lent and enter into Holy Week, remember what happened to Jesus. On Palm Sunday we begin Mass by singing Hosanas and waving palm branches, welcoming Jesus, the king, into Jerusalem. By the end of the Mass we have turned away and in the reading of His passion yell out “Crucify Him!” So, are we following Jesus or not?

Jesus accepted His challenge of showing us the way to love God and get to heaven. In the Garden of Gethsemane as He prayed to His Father He said, “Not my will, but Your will be done.” He showed us how it is done. He fell three times on His way to Calvary, yet got back up knowing He would be crucified. Are you allowing God's will to be done in your life or do you want it your way? What is the cross you have to bear? Does it seem too much? Impossible to carry? Remember Christ’s mercy. If you fall, pick yourself up and begin again. That is what He wants for all of us.

One devotion of the Easter season is the Divine Mercy Chaplet. We had the opportunity to go on a pilgrimage to Poland and visit the convent outside of Krakow where St. Faustina lived her final years. She had conversations with Christ and was given the image of the Divine Mercy and told how to pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet. It is a beautiful place and being able to pray in front of the original image was very special. Below the image are the words “Jesus, I Trust in You.” On the grounds of the convent is a garden path and on the walls that phrase written in many languages. His mercy is for everyone.

The Novena (nine days of prayer) of the Divine Mercy begins on Good Friday and ends the Saturday before Divine Mercy Sunday (the first Sunday after Easter). Go to www.praymorenovenas.com to see the image and learn how to pray it. It is very easy to learn and can be said on your rosary beads.

Jesus offers us His Divine Mercy every time we stumble and fall. No sin or wrong-doing is greater than His mercy. Go to confession and pray this with your family and watch as the graces begin to flow.

This Easter season add the Divine Mercy Novena to your repertoire. Easter is the beginning of a new life with Christ, beginning new life with the warming of spring and the beginning of enjoying God’s infinite love and mercy. Trust in Jesus, He wants you to be with Him in heaven. Jesus, we trust in you. 

—— Pax Christi, Carlin & Deacon Dave Gould, Family Life Office Co-Directors

Twelve French Churches Attacked, Vandalized in One Week

Thomas D. Williams, Ph.D. March 20, (Reuters)

A dozen Catholic churches have been desecrated across France over the period of one week in an egregious case of anti-Christian vandalism.

The recent spate of church profanations has puzzled both police and ecclesiastical leaders, who have mostly remained silent as the violations have spread up and down France.

Last Sunday, marauders set fire to the church of Saint-Sulpice—one of Paris’ largest and most important churches—shortly after the twelve-o’clock Mass.

Police have concluded that the fire was the result of arson and are now looking for possible suspects. The restoration of the church from the damage caused by the fire will reportedly cost several hundred million euros.

In Nimes (department of the Gard), near the border with Spain, the church of Notre-Dame des Enfants was desecrated in a particularly odious way, with vandals painting a cross with human excrement, looting the main altar and the tabernacle, and stealing the consecrated hosts, which were discovered later among piles of garbage.

Likewise, the church of Notre-Dame in Dijon, in the east of the country, suffered the sacking of the high altar and the hosts were also taken from the tabernacle, scattered on the ground, and trampled.

In Lavaur, in the southern department of the Tarn, Police have concluded that the fire was the result of arson, and the same year 2018 this meant the profanation of places of worship in France concerns Christian churches and in the year 2018 this meant the profanation of an average of two Christian churches per day in France, even though these actions rarely make the headlines.

In 2018, the Ministry of the Interior recorded 541 anti-Semitic acts, 100 anti-Muslim acts, and 1063 anti-Christian acts.

Thomas D. Williams is 2018 Visiting Research Scholar at Notre Dame University’s Center for Ethics and Culture, and Rome Bureau Chief for Breitbart News.
Stand Beneath The Cross With Mary

By Sister Constance Veit, LSP

This Lent I’ve been focusing on the seven sorrows of Mary, which span Jesus’ infancy through his death and burial. The scene that comes back to me over and over is that of Mary cradling her deceased Son on her lap—the image known as the pieta.

I think it’s a natural reaction, when someone dies, for loved ones to want to see and touch the body of the deceased. In our mission caring for the elderly and dying, we often see this—family members seem to want to linger, to hold their deceased loved one’s hand or stroke their hair, to give them a final kiss, say a prayer, or share one last story. Sometimes family members need time to let the reality sink in, or perhaps they want to engrave their loved one’s features in their memory.

In Mary’s case the body taken down from the Cross was the Son she had brought into the world and wrapped in swaddling clothes. This was the same body, but now he was so bruised, bloodied and broken that he was nearly beyond human appearance.

Mary must have suffered terribly to see the horrible reality before her eyes, but I’m sure she lingered over each wound, especially the hole in his side created by the soldier’s lance.

Setting aside any theological interpretation, why did the soldier violently stab someone who was clearly already dead? It was brutal and unnecessary, like when a killer stands over his victim firing excessive shots into the body at point blank range.

How cruelly and disrespectfully they treated Mary’s Son—that final wound was so unnecessary! Was it meant to demoralize those standing at the foot of the Cross, or to prove that Jesus was not really the Messiah after all?

Reflecting on this scene makes me think of all the ways that the human body is disrespected in today’s throw-away culture: from abortion, assisted suicide and euthanasia, to pornography, human trafficking, child abuse, war and violent crime, substance abuse, abandonment of the elderly and systemic injustices that leave far too many people without adequate food and water, housing, and basic hygiene and health care.

Already in 2019, we’ve seen the legalization of late term abortion in New York and Vermont. Similar legislation failed in Virginia, but it is currently being pursued in Rhode Island. In early March the campaign to legalize physician-assisted suicide advanced in Rhode Island, and the Patients Rights Council, a national watchdog organization for end of life issues, reported that there are assisted suicide bills pending in 16 states.

As I contemplate the image of the pieta, I feel drawn to place all who suffer and all whose human dignity is violated in Mary’s lap, alongside her crucified Son. I know this seems like a burden too great for one person to bear, but when Jesus confided the beloved disciple to his mother as he hung on the cross, he effectively gave her as mother to all of his followers, in every age.

Mary possesses rock-solid faith, a will of steel and superhuman resilience—after all, who else ever had a sword thrust through their heart and lived? I have no doubt that her arms are strong enough to hold all who suffer like her Son, and her mantle remains broad enough to shelter all who run to her.

During World Youth Day in January, Pope Francis said that Christ continues to suffer and carry his cross “in a society that has lost the ability to weep and to be moved by suffering.” I have no doubt that as long as Christ goes on suffering in his Mystical Body, Mary his Mother will continue to stand beneath the cross—beneath our personal crosses, no matter how numerous or seemingly insignificant—as our refuge and our hope.

Sister Constance Veit is director of communications for the Little Sisters of the Poor.

(Hate Speech, cont. from page 7)

mands released under the country’s Freedom of Information Act last week revealed that the Scottish Government had received many complaints about the “Dear Bigots” campaign. A government official stated that there are “no plans to re-use the ‘Dear Bigots’ letter in future.”

“Some people might suggest that expressing the Catholic Church’s position on marriage or human sexuality could be an attempt to stir up hatred,” Horan said.

“This would obviously be wrong, but without room for robust debate and exchange of views we risk becoming an intolerant, illiberal society.”

❖
Santa Fe, N.M., Mar 25 (CNA) - The Archbishop of Santa Fe said recently that people praying to "Saint Death" won't find the answers they're looking for.

Archbishop John Wester told the Associated Press recently that Catholics praying to the skeletal figure, popular in Central America, may be fooled into thinking that "Santa Muerte" is an approved devotional practice in the Church.

But the practice of praying to "Saint Death" is not consistent with Catholic teaching, the archbishop said.

"It's really wrong," Wester told the AP.

"I think in part, it's (because) people are looking and searching. It's a symptom of a search looking for answers."

"Our devotion is to the God of life," he added.

In 2013, a Vatican official condemned devotion to "Santa Muerte," equating it to "the celebration of devastation and of hell."

"It's not every day that a folk saint is actually condemned at the highest levels of the Vatican," Andrew Chesnut, a Santa Muerte expert, told CNA in 2016.

Chesnut is the Bishop Walter F. Sullivan Chair in Catholic Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University and author of "Devoted to Death: Santa Muerte, the Skeleton Saint," the only English academic book to date on the subject.

Despite her condemnation from on high, Santa Muerte remains increasingly popular among criminals, drug lords and those on the fringes of society, as well as cultural Catholics who maybe don't know (or care) that she is condemned by the Church.

"She's basically the poster girl of narco-satanic spirituality," Chesnut said.

According to Chesnut's estimates, Santa Muerte is the fastest growing religious movement in the Americas—and it's all happened within the past 10-15 years.

"She was unknown to 99 percent of Mexicans before 2001, when she went public. Now I estimate there's some 10-12 million devotees, mostly in Mexico, but also significant numbers in the United States and Central America," he said.

Part of the attraction to Santa Muerte, as several sources familiar with the devotion explained, is that she is seen as a non-judgemental saint that can be invoked for some not-so-holy petitions.

"If somebody is going to be doing something illegal, and they want to be protected from the law enforcement, they feel awkward asking God to protect them," Fr. Andres Gutierrez, the pastor of St. Helen parish in Rio Hondo, Texas, explained to CNA in 2016.

"So they promise something to Santa Muerte in exchange for being protected from the law."

Devotees also feel comfortable going to her for favors of vengeance—something they would never ask of God or a canonized saint, Chesnut said.

"I think this non-judgemental saint who's going to accept me as I am is appealing," Chesnut said, particularly to criminals or to people who don't feel completely accepted within the Mexican Catholic or Evangelical churches.

"The cultural Catholicism of Mexico and the drug wars of the past decade also made for the perfect storm for Santa Muerte to catch on, Chesnut explained. Even Mexicans who didn't grow up going to Mass every Sunday still have a basic idea of what Catholicism entails - Mass and Saints and prayers like the rosary, all things that have been hi-jacked and adapted by the Santa Muerte movement.

"You can almost see some of it as kind of an extreme heretical form of folk Catholicism," he said. "In fact, I can say Santa Muerte could only have arisen from a Catholic environment."

This, coupled with the fact that Mexican Catholics are suddenly much more familiar with death, with the recent drug wars having left upwards of 60,000 -120,000 Mexicans dead—makes a saint of death that much more intriguing.

"Paradoxically, a lot of devotees who feel like death could be just around the corner - maybe they're narco's, maybe they work in the street, maybe they're security guards who might be gunned down - they ask Santa Muerte for protection."

Her familiarity and appeal is actually part of the danger of this devotion, Fr. Gutierrez said.

"(Santa Muerte) is literally a demon with another name," he said. "That's what it is."

In his own ministry, Fr. Gutierrez said he has witnessed people who "suffer greatly" following a devotion to the folk saint.

Fr. Gary Thomas, a Vatican-trained exorcist for the Diocese of San Jose, told CNA in 2016 that he has also prayed with people who have had demonic trouble after praying to Santa Muerte.

"I have had a number of people who have come to me as users of this practice and found themselves tied to a demon or demonic tribe," he said.

Fr. Gutierrez noted that while Catholics who attend Mass and the sacraments on a regular basis tend to understand this about Santa Muerte, those in danger are the cultural Catholics who aren't intentionally engaging in something harmful, but could be opening the door to spiritual harm nonetheless.

Besides her demonic ties, "Santa Muerte" is also a perversion of what the practice of praying to saints is all about, Fr. Ryan Kaup, a Nebraska priest active in Hispanic ministry, told CNA in 2016.

"What we venerate as saints are real people who have chosen this life to follow the will of our Lord and have done great things with their lives, and now they're in heaven forever, and so that's why we ask for their intercession," Kaup said.

"So taking this devotion and this practice that we have of asking for this saint's intercession and twisting it in such a way as to invoke this glorified image of death is really a distortion of what we believe is true intercession and truly the power of the saints."
In Ohio, Catholic Decline Means Youngstown Diocese Stretched Thin

Youngstown, Ohio, Mar 26, 2019 (CNA) - The Diocese of Youngstown is planning to respond to serious challenges caused by declines in Catholic affiliation and participation, the looming retirement of many priests, and a general decline in the area's population.

“Our priests have been stretched beyond what is healthy trying to maintain current parishes and Mass schedules,” Bishop George Murry, S.J., of Youngstown said in a March 22 letter to the Catholics of his diocese. “Given the fewer number of priests and fewer number of active Catholics, we can no longer continue the status quo.”

Ohio population projections foresee continued decline over the next decade. There is also “significant decline” in Catholic affiliation and participation, Murry reported. Registered parishioners have declined 36 percent since 2000 and general participation in parish life has “decreased even more.”

Regular weekend Mass attendance is down by over 60 percent, and Baptisms, First Communions, Confirmations, and Marriages are one-third the number they were in 2000. Fewer priests are a “serious challenge.”

As of 2000, there were 116 priests in active ministry in the diocese. This declined to 73 in 2018, and the diocese estimates the number of priests will fall to 55 in 2025. Thirteen priests are over 71 years old, and more than half of the priests are over age 61.

In light of these and other factors, Murry said, any pastoral plan “must renew and strengthen our ministry to those within our care, and also those who do not participate in the life of the Church on a regular basis.”

The situation requires “shared sacrifice.”

The dioceses’ six counties will be divided into 17 pastoral regions which each include multiple parishes. These parishes will collaborate in administration and ministry to best address the local situation, Murry said. Each region will recommend to the bishop how best to collaborate among staff, programs, events, and outreach efforts.

So far the only decisions of the planners concern the regional approach to pastoral ministry and the implementation of church law barring priests from celebrating more than three regular weekend Masses over the Saturday anticipated Mass and Sunday. This implementation will require some changes in Mass schedules.

At present there are 234 Masses celebrated each weekend in the diocese, but the church buildings are under half-capacity for 77 percent of these Masses. About 40 percent of priests are responsible for multiple ministries, parishes, or worship sites.

“While there are many challenges, there are also opportunities,” Murry said. “The Holy Spirit is present as our helper and guide, empowering the clergy and laity to work together, each using their gifts for building up the Church.”

He prayed that the planning process may be an occasion for everyone to grow more deeply in their faith, remembering “the promise that Jesus will be with us, even to the end of the age.”

According to the Catholic Hierarchy website, the total population in the territory of the Youngstown diocese peaked in 1980 at over 1.3 million, of whom Catholics numbered 286,000—about 22 percent.

Youngstown diocesan figures for the year 2000 report about 256,000 Catholics out of 1,220,000 people, declining through 2018 to 163,000 Catholics out of 1,166,000 people, about 14 percent of the population.

Declining population trends are not unique to the Youngstown diocese but are “especially apparent” throughout the Midwest and Northeast.

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Venezuelan Bishops Repudiate Arrest of Opposition Figure Roberto Marrero

In face of this incident, they called on Venezuelans “not to lose hope and to trust in the power of Jesus Christ, which is the power of love.”

Caracas, Venezuela, Mar 26 (CNA) - The Justice and Peace Commission of the Venezuelan bishops’ conference has repudiated last week’s arrest of Roberto Marrero, chief of staff to opposition leader Juan Guaidó.

In the early hours of March 21, agents of the Bolivarian Intelligence Service stormed the homes of Marrero and Sergio Vergara, an opposition legislator and Marrero’s neighbor.

Marrero was arrested along with his driver, Luis Páez. The Argentine daily Clarín reported that Marrero is being held in El Helicoide, a government facility often used to house political prisoners. He has been accused by the government of Nicolas Maduro of terrorism and treason.

Guaidó reported on Twitter that Marrero alerted him that the agents “planted two rifles and a grenade” in his house.

The Venezuelan bishops’ Justice and Peace Commission stated March 22 that it “repudiates” the detention of Marrero and the raid on Vergara, “in the face of the actions committed by officials of SEBIN, with the authorization of judges and the participation of prosecutors from the Public Prosecutor's Office.”

They stated that these acts “attack and violate the fundamental rights provided for in our Magna Carta, such as personal freedom and parliamentarian immunity, “which the members of the National Assembly enjoy in the exercise of their functions.”

“This ecclesial body laments these violations and denounces them to the pertinent bodies so that they may exercise and comply with the powers that the constitution and laws confer on them in order to restore the violated rights of these citizens,” they said.

The bishops' conference's commission reminded “the judicial officials, prosecutors of the Public Prosecutor's Office and the arresting police officers that they cannot justify their actions alleging compliance with orders from superiors. The consequent crimes of those actions are imprescriptible.”

“In accordance with our Magna Carta, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, we reiterate that no individual should be apprehended and deprived of his freedom by arbitrary decisions,” the bishops stated.

In face of this incident, they called on Venezuelans “not to lose hope and to trust in the power of Jesus Christ, which is the power of love.”

Guaidó declared himself interim president in January and has been recognized by a number of Western governments, but has been unable to secure the support of Venezuela’s military.

Caracas faced blackouts March 25-26. The government has been attacked by the opposition, while the opposition has noted decades of corruption and a lack of investment. ♦

Join us for a Women’s Day of Reflection
hosted by
Santa Rosa Diocesan Council of Catholic Women

Our Lady’s Guide to True Femininity
Presented by the Marian Sisters of Santa Rosa

Saturday, May 4, 2019
St. Sebastian’s Parish Hall
7983 Covert Lane, Sebastopol, CA 95472
(The Parish Hall is located behind the church to the right of the office.)

FREE (Donations to SRDCCW are encouraged to cover expenses.)

Schedules of Events:
8:30 am – Early registration
9:00 am – Mass in the church
After Mass – Continental breakfast in the hall provided by SRDCCW
10:15 am – Morning Presentation – Privilege of Being a Woman
11:15 am – Rosary and Crowning of Our Lady
11:45 am – Brown bag lunch (bring your own). Drinks will be provided.
12:30 pm – Afternoon Workshop – Principal Virtues of Mary
1:30 pm – Closing and final prayer – Litany of our Lady

R.S.V.P. by May 1st
Cindy Cunningham  SantaRosaDCCW@gmail.com  707-592-9833
Gloria Krzyzanowski  srdccwgloria@hotmail.com  707-763-3354

Support – Empower – Educate
Santa Rosa Diocesan Council of Catholic Women

In preparation we encourage reading The Privilege of Being a Woman by Alice von Hildebrand available at Simply Sacred Books, 707-528-7749  simplysacredbooksandgifts@gmail.com
and Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women
US Secretary of State Expands Mexico City Policy

By Christine Rousselle

Washington D.C., Mar 26 (CNA) US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced Tuesday an expansion of the pro-life Mexico City Policy and the slashing of funds to the Organization of American States in response to its abortion advocacy.

These new policies are designed to ensure that taxpayer dollars are not used to fund abortion or the promotion of abortion abroad.

“As a result of my decision today, we are also making clear we will refuse to provide assistance to foreign NGOs that give financial support to other foreign groups in the global abortion industry,” Pompeo explained.

Pompeo also announced that the federal law known as the “Siljander Amendment” will be “fully enforced.” The Siljander Amendment prohibits the use of U.S. funds, including foreign aid, to be used to lobby for or against abortion. This announcement came after “recent evidence of abortion-related advocacy by an organ of the Organization of American States (OAS),” said Pompeo, who added that he directed a new provision to foreign assistance agreements with OAS which “explicitly prohibits” money being used to lobby for or against abortion.

Instead of lobbying for abortion, Pompeo said that the OAS should be concerned with the crises in its member states Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela.

In response to discovering that an organ of the OAS was “advancing the pro-abortion cause,” Pompeo announced that the State Department would be reducing the amount of money it gives each year to the OAS.

“Our reduction equals the estimated U.S. share of possible OAS expenditures on these abortion-related activities,” he said.

The United States contributes about $9 billion each year in foreign aid to global health programs. Since reactivating the Mexico City Policy in 2017, as is customary for Republican administrations, Pompeo said the “vast majority” of NGOs affected by the policy have agreed to stop performing or promoting abortion in order to continue to receive funds.

This, explained Pompeo, is evidence that the United States “can continue to meet our critical global health goals, including providing healthcare for women, while refusing to subsidize the killing of unborn babies.”

Two Types of Blindness

By Dr. Alice von Hildebrand

Plato's name has been mentioned more than once in these pages. He deserves to be mentioned once again. Hopefully, you are acquainted with his great work, The Republic. In case you have not, may I urge you to read it, especially Book VIII, which has inspired what I am about to tell you.

Plato’s thesis in that book can be summarized as follows: Human beings can be compared to prisoners born and raised in a dark cave. They are chained and are forced to face a wall right in front of them. Shadows of all sorts of objects are projected on this wall; but they cannot perceive the objects producing these shadows.

These prisoners are truly in a sorry state: being chained they are incapable of turning around and will necessarily assume that the shadows they perceive are real objects. For a shadow is always the shadow of something else, and when this something else cannot be perceived, the viewer will inevitably assume that it possesses the independence which is the prerogative of real objects.

But one man—we shall call him the philosopher—manages to liberate himself from his bonds, and reaches the exit of the dark cave in which he was born and has lived all his life. The moment he comes outside of his prison, the brightness of the sun’s light will blind him. Being used to darkness, his eyes are incapable of standing daylight. The poor prisoner will necessarily assume that his situation has worsened: for before he could see something; now he sees nothing.

But slowly his pupils will adjust to his new environment, and for the first time in his life, he will perceive real objects—at first only those within his reach. This perception will open the eyes of his mind to a terrible shaking discovery. But by now our hero’s pupils are
Knight’s doctor prescribed the hysterectomy as treatment for gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoria is a condition in which a person believes themselves to have been “misassigned” their gender at birth.

St. Joseph Health said in a statement reported March 25 that hysterectomies are only performed at their facilities when they have been deemed “medically necessary,” and not for purposes of sterilization. The teaching of the Catholic Church recognizes such procedure as licit when there is a grave and present danger to the life or health of the mother, and when the intention of the procedure is not to prevent the possibility of conception.

In January 2019, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued an authoritative response which explained the circumstances under which a hysterectomy could be morally licit. A 2016 letter to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services signed by the general counsel for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, together with other groups, affirmed that the denial of surgery to someone seeking to change their gender would not be discriminatory, noting that in such cases there would be nothing medically wrong with otherwise healthy organs to be removed.

“The is not ‘discrimination’ when a hospital provides care it considers appropriate, declines to perform procedures destructive to patients’ welfare and well-being, or declines to take actions that undermine the health, safety, and privacy of other patients,” the letter said.

“A hospital does not engage in “discrimination” when, for example, it performs a mastectomy or hysterectomy on a woman with breast or uterine cancer, respectively; but declines to perform such a procedure on a woman with perfectly healthy breasts or uterus who is seeking to have the appearance of a man.”

Knight is being represented in part by the ACLU. The suit requests unspecified damages. She also claims to have been repeatedly “mis-gendered” by workers at St. Joseph Hospital, and was allegedly given a pink hospital gown to wear instead of a blue one.

In California, “gender identity” based discrimination is illegal, but the application of the statute in cases involving religious organizations remains disputed.

In 2017, a woman sued California’s largest chain of hospitals, Dignity Health, after doctors declined to perform a scheduled hysterectomy at Mercy San Juan Medical Center. The defendant in that case also claimed that she was denied the procedure due to gender identity. The case Minton v. Dignity Health was decided in favor of Dignity Health, but an appeal has been filed.

First Annual Choir Festival
Nine Catholic schools participated in the first annual Catholic Choirs Festival, held this year on March 19 at St. Rose Catholic School. Elementary and Secondary school choirs traveled from across the diocese to perform songs related to the festival’s theme, “Songs of Faith and Virtue.” The celebration concluded with an all-sing of Jubilate Deo and a song of blessing by Bishop Vasa.

Catholic hospital group sued for refusing transgender hysterectomy
San Francisco, Calif., Mar 25 (CNA) - A group of five Catholic hospitals in California is being sued by a woman who identifies as a transgender man after one of its locations, St. Joseph Hospital, Eureka, refused to perform a hysterectomy.

Oliver Knight is suing St. Joseph Health of Northern California, alleging that she was refused the surgery because of her “gender orientation.” The suit was filed in the Humboldt County Superior Court on Thursday, March 21. In the lawsuit, Knight says that workers at the hospital canceled the surgery because she identifies as transgender. Knight had identified herself as “male” for a period of four years before the surgery, which was initially scheduled for Aug. 30, 2017.

Prior to the scheduled hysterectomy, Knight had begun cross-sex hormone therapy and undergone a mastectomy. After the surgery at St. Joseph was denied, Knight underwent a hysterectomy at a hospital unaffiliated with the St. Joseph Health of Northern California system, 30 minutes away.

Knight’s lawsuit claims that by denying the surgery St. Joseph Health caused “severe anxiety and emotional turmoil.”

Knight’s doctor prescribed the hysterectomy as treatment for gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoria is a condition in which a person believes themselves to have been “misassigned” their gender at birth.

St. Joseph Health said in a statement reported March 25 that hysterectomies are only performed at their facilities when they have been deemed “medically necessary,” and not for purposes of sterilization. The teaching of the Catholic Church recognizes such procedure as licit when there is a grave and present danger to the life or health of the mother, and when the intention of the procedure is not to prevent the possibility of conception.

In January 2019, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued an authoritative response which explained the circumstances under which a hysterectomy could be morally licit. A 2016 letter to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services signed by the general counsel for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, together with other groups, affirmed that the denial of surgery to someone seeking to change their gender would not be discriminatory, noting that in such cases there would be nothing medically wrong with otherwise healthy organs to be removed.

“The is not ‘discrimination’ when a hospital provides care it considers appropriate, declines to perform procedures destructive to patients’ welfare and well-being, or declines to take actions that undermine the health, safety, and privacy of other patients,” the letter said.

“A hospital does not engage in “discrimination” when, for example, it performs a mastectomy or hysterectomy on a woman with breast or uterine cancer, respectively; but declines to perform such a procedure on a woman with perfectly healthy breasts or uterus who is seeking to have the appearance of a man.”

Knight is being represented in part by the ACLU. The suit requests unspecified damages. She also claims to have been repeatedly “mis-gendered” by workers at St. Joseph Hospital, and was allegedly given a pink hospital gown to wear instead of a blue one.

In California, “gender identity” based discrimination is illegal, but the application of the statute in cases involving religious organizations remains disputed.

In 2017, a woman sued California’s largest chain of hospitals, Dignity Health, after doctors declined to perform a scheduled hysterectomy at Mercy San Juan Medical Center. The defendant in that case also claimed that she was denied the procedure due to gender identity. The case Minton v. Dignity Health was decided in favor of Dignity Health, but an appeal has been filed.

National
California AG Files to Block Title X Abortion ‘Gag Rule’
San Francisco, Calif., Mar 25 (CNA) - California’s attorney general on Friday asked a federal judge to block a new Trump administration rule designed to strip abortion clinics of federal funds distributed through the Title X program.

In a March 22 announcement, California’s Attorney General Xavier Becerra called the Protect Life Rule “reckless and illegal” and “a dangerous political ploy to sabotage women’s reproductive healthcare.”

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services finalized the “Protect Life Rule” in late February, by which abortion clinics will be ineligible to receive Title X Program funding. The rule also prohibits clinics receiving funds from referring patients to other doctors for abortions, and bars funded clinics from sharing space with abortion clinics.

The California attorney general’s motion for a preliminary injunction against the rule argues that the rule “undermines clinically established standards of care, interferes with the patient-provider relationship, and contradicts core tenets of the Title X program.”

Dr. Tanya Spirito of the California Medical Association wrote in a declaration filed with the attorney general’s motion that the Protect Life Rule “restricts physicians from speaking freely with their patients, violates core ethical standards, and undermines the physician-patient relationship.”

Title X is a federal program created in 1965 that subsidizes family-planning and preventative health services, including contraception, for low-income families. It has been frequently updated and subject to new regulations. California has the largest Title X program in the country, serving nearly a quarter of all Title X patients nationwide, according to the attorney general’s office.

Planned Parenthood, which provides abortions, is expected to lose about $60 million in federal funds under the new federal rule, which is set to go into effect during April.

Last year, Planned Parenthood received over $500 million in federal funds, about 10% of which came from the Title X program. The abortion chain is still eligible for federal funds that are not part of Title X.

Nearly two dozen states, led by Oregon and including California, are already suing the administration over the Protect Life Rule.

Becerra filed California’s lawsuit against the US Department of Health and Human Services on March 4 in the Northern District Court of California in San Francisco.

The preliminary injunction, if granted, would block the rule’s implementation while the court reviews the state’s lawsuit.

The District Court is set to hear arguments on the preliminary injunction April 18.

Among other provisions, the Protect Life Rule requires that there be a physical and financial separation between recipients of Title X funds and facilities that perform abortions. Clinics that provide “nondirective counseling” about abortion can still receive funds.

Previous regulations, written during Bill Clinton’s presidency, not only allowed for health clinics that were co-located with abortion clinics to receive funds, but also required that Title X recipients refer patients for abortions.

Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ), chairman of the Bipartisan Congressional Pro-Life Caucus, said the new rules move Title X closer to “its originally intended purpose—the provision of family planning services, not abortions.”

Pro-life advocates have welcomed the HHSS rule change. Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of the Susan B. Anthony List, praised the move, saying that it was targeted at abortion provision alone and would not reduce other family planning services by “a single dime.”

“The Title X program was not intended to be a slush fund for abortion businesses like Planned Parenthood, which violently ends the lives of more than (see News Briefs, page 16)
(News Briefs, cont. from page 15)

332,000 unborn babies a year and receives almost $60 million a year in Title X taxpayer dollars," she said in a Feb. 22 statement.

Phoenix Eucharistic Retreat Seeks to Foster Sacramental Devotion

Phoenix, Ariz., Mar 24 (CNA) - At the end of this month, the Diocese of Phoenix will host a retreat that aims to inspire devotion to and education on the Eucharist.

According to Catholic Sun, Phoenix Bishop Thomas Olmsted expressed hope that the event will help participants “to have an even deeper sense of awe and wonder at the love of Jesus present under the humble appearance of bread and wine.”

“The more we grow in love of our Savior, the more we can work through us for the good of others,” he said.

The Lenten Eucharistic Mission is sponsored by the diocese and Friends of the Cathedral. It will take place March 28-30.

The event will include Masses celebrated by Bishop Thomas Olmsted and Auxiliary Bishop Eduardo Nevares. Speakers from the Denver-based Augustine Institute will include president Dr. Tim Gray and professors Dr. Michael Barber and Dr. Mark Giszewski.

MaryAnn Symancyk, a board member for Friends of the Cathedral and director of adult formation at St. Paul Parish, said the event is for everyone regardless of their theological background.

“They have a beautiful way of teaching the faith and catechizing on every level,” she said of the Augustine Institute, according to the Catholic Sun.

Symancyk said attendees will grow in their understanding about Scripture and its relation to the Eucharist.

“We need to know the biblical references, the history of the Eucharist from the Old Testament through to the New Testament. That’s what the Augustine Institute will bring us,” she said.

A recent study from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate found that 91 percent of Catholics who attend Mass weekly believe in Christ’s True Presence in the Eucharist. However, this number drops to 40 percent among those who attend Mass only a few times a year.

One of the main goals of the retreat is to equip Catholics to share their knowledge and love of the Eucharist with others. Attendees will have access to apologetic and educational material on the Eucharist.

“People leave our faith but what draws them back is always the Eucharist,” Symancyk said. “When we know our faith on that level, especially with the focus on the blessed sacrament, the more we can evangelize and the more people stay in our faith or come back to the faith.”

International

Civil Disobedience Is a Fundamental Right, Says Venezuelan Cardinal

Caracas, Venezuela, Mar 22 (CNA) - A Venezuelan cardinal has called on state security forces to exercise civil disobedience when given orders to use lethal force against citizens.

“State security agencies exist not to take care of the government but to take care of the citizens,” said Cardinal Baltazar Porras, at a press conference this week.

“Therefore every order that is given that goes against the lives of the citizenry is an order to kill, it is an order which there is no duty to carry out nor heed, because civil disobedience is also a fundamental right,” the cardinal stressed.

Porras, who serves as an archbishop of Merida and apostolic administrator of Caracas, stressed the disobeying unjust orders is both a right and a duty for members of the security forces.

Since Nicolas Maduro succeeded Hugo Chavez as president of Venezuela in 2013, the country has been marred by violence and social upheaval. Under the socialist government, the country has seen hyperinflation and severe shortages of food, medicine, and other necessities, and millions have emigrated.

Amid the protests that have taken place throughout the country, dozens of people have been killed by security forces.

Cardinal Porras stressed that “it’s a citizen’s right, a right in any democracy to be able to hold demonstrations and to say what [you think] will solve the problems.”

The cardinal made these statements the same day that the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights and former president of Chile, Michelle Bachelet, delivered a report to the world organization in Geneva, Switzerland, after sending a mission to Venezuela.

“In the context of the last wave of protests in the first two months of this year, my office documented numerous violations of human rights, torture and abuses committed by the security forces and armed pro-government groups,” Bachelet said.

She said that in Venezuela, democratic freedoms have been restricted, with limited freedom of speech and the criminalization of peaceful protest and disobedience.

Cardinal Porras also stressed the importance of allowing the entrance of humanitarian aid into the country. Maduro has blocked the international aid, denying that it is needed in the country.

The humanitarian aid, the cardinal said, must be “for malnourished children, the elderly, for those requiring ongoing treatment...We have to keep on insisting on this.”

Montreal Priest Stabbed at Mass ‘Eager’ To Return

Montreal, Canada, Mar 23 (CNA) - Father Claude Grou is out of the hospital and grateful for the groundswell of support he received after he was stabbed by an assailant while celebrating a televised Mass at St. Joseph’s Oratory in Montreal Friday morning.

The 77-year-old priest said in a statement that the words of support he had received “warm my heart and allow me to contemplate these difficult moments peacefully.” He said he was in good health and still processing the Friday attack, CBC News reports.

Celine Barbeau, a spokesperson for the oratory, said the priest will grudgingly take a few days’ break. Though he needs a few days, he is in “a very good state of mind,” said Barbeau.

“And actually he’s eager to go back to work. We have to hold him back,” said the spokesperson.

Grou was standing behind the altar for daily Mass with about 60 congregants in the oratory’s Crypt Church when he was rushed by a man in a baseball cap, who stabbed him.

The church security team quickly detained the attacker, BBC News reports. The incident was broadcast live.

Authorities detained a 26-year-old suspect they said is known to police.

The priest, who is rector of the shrine, was taken away by ambulance. Montreal police said he suffered upper-body “lacerations.”

Adèle Plamondon was finishing the day’s reading when the assailant stood up from the pew.

“I saw this man coming quickly and taking his knife out and going straight for Père Grou,” she said, according to CBC News. “It was obvious what his intentions were. So, I left screaming to alert the security.”

The attack drew comment from many people.

“Father Claude Grou, Canadians are thinking of you and wishing you a swift recovery,” Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Twitter the day of the attack.

“We are all shocked by this act of violence that has taken place in our city, in a space dedicated to peace,” Archbishop Christian Lepine of Montreal said in a statement.

“We know that places of worship of many religions are targets of acts of violence,” the archbishop continued. “We must continue to follow the path of peace and love, believing that good will overcome evil through prayer and good works.”

Construction on the mountaintop oratory was finished in 1967. Its dome is visible from across Montreal. It is the largest shrine dedicated to St. Joseph in the world, with about two million annual visitors.

St. Andre Bessette, a Holy Cross brother devoted to the poor and sick, had built a chapel to St. Joseph on the site with money he received from giving haircuts to students. He spread devotion to St. Joseph and the brother’s prayers were believed to be especially effective in working miraculous cures, drawing many visitors.

Larger versions of the chapel were built as more and more visitors came. When he died in 1937, over one million people attended his wake and funeral.

Brother Andre was canonized under Pope Benedict XVI in 2010. 

April 30: St. Pius V
Cardinal Cupich Warns Against ‘Radical’ Illinois Abortion Bills

Chicago, Ill., Mar 26 (CNA) - Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago has spoken out against a pair of Illinois abortion bills, calling them a radical and disturbing movement away from the common good.

In a March 23 letter to the people of his archdiocese, Cupich encouraged Catholics to take a stand against the legislation.

One of the bills—introduced as House Bill 2495 and Senate Bill 1942—“seeks to strip unborn persons of any protection—or even consideration—under the law and declares abortion to be a ‘fundamental right’ and matter of health care,” he warned.

The bill would remove many of the medical regulations surrounding abortion in the state, including a ban on partial-birth abortion. It would also require private health insurance to fully fund abortion.

“The end result is that an abortion could be obtained at any stage of pregnancy, including late term, for any reason and without any regulation. The law would no longer guarantee any modicum of humanity or compassion for any unborn person in Illinois, even if they are partially born,” the cardinal said.

He added that the bill would also undo the state’s Abortion Performance Refusal Act, which currently offers protection for medical personnel who object to advising or participating in abortion.

“In so doing, rights of conscience, especially religious objections, will be lost,” he said.

Another piece of legislation—introduced as House Bill 2467 and Senate Bill 1594—would repeal a current Illinois law requiring parental notification for a minor seeking an abortion, unless a judge grants a waiver.

Cupich said the parental notification law is a “common sense” measure that helps ensure that parents can “be part of the life-altering decision of their minor child in the case she seeks an abortion.” He noted that the law was unanimously upheld by the Illinois Supreme Court six years ago.

“As citizens of a state and people of faith who care about the common good, I urge you to join me and my brother bishops in an effort to defeat this radical departure from current law and practice in our state,” the cardinal said.

He encouraged Catholics in the archdiocese to contact their state legislators and ask them to oppose the legislation. The Illinois Catholic Conference offers resources to connect people with their representatives.

The Illinois bills are part of a broader state-level movement away from the common good. "the age of enlightenment," if we keep in mind that the Enlightenment was so strong that it blinded those looking at it. It is worth noticing that the prisoner shows no interest whatever in questioning the peculiarities of his environment.

The philosopher can now draw the conclusion that man can be blinded both by darkness, (because of lack of light), and by light when the very luminosity of an object is too strong for his weak eye sight to contemplate.

He now recalls the sad fate of his fellow prisoners, and instead of enjoying the beauty which he has perceived, he decides to go back to the cave, and inform them of their error. Plato here clearly hints at the fact that truth is "ours" and should not remain the "property" of a single individual who has been blessed with discovering it.

Out of loving concern for the welfare of the unfortunate prisoners, the philosopher decides to re-enter his place of birth. But upon doing so, he finds himself plunged into darkness. Once again, his sight fails him, but this time, for the opposite reason: there is too little light. Nevertheless, gropingly he finds his way back to his old place.

The prisoners—as usual—kill time trying to identify the shadows appearing on the wall; the first one who succeeds is, of course, the smartest. The philosopher who used to be good at the game, is now totally helpless; having seen real objects, shadows strike him as so unsubstantial that he can no longer victoriously compete with his companions. As a result, the latter come to the conclusion that anyone who leaves the cave should be punished by death, for by so doing, he comes back without his eyes. (An obvious reference to the fate that Socrates suffered because he tried to make men “see”). It is worth noticing that the prisoners show no interest whatever in questioning the peculiarities of their environment. They are used to their dark cave and feel comfortable in it. (Kierkegaard expressed the same truth by pointing out that many men actually choose to live in the cellar of their house.)

We are back to our pet theme: blindness can be caused by an excess of light, or by a defect of light. But in both cases, the result is identical—we cannot see.

May I assume that by now your spirit of discernment has been so refined that you immediately see how catastrophic it would be to confuse the two cases: blindness caused by too much light, and blindness caused by too little light? In one case blindness results from our own weakness; in the other case, by a deficiency on the object side.

You must have observed that when people see badly, the usually lay the blame on the object, very much as when people are getting hard of hearing they will accuse others of not speaking clearly. The point I am trying to make is that there are plenty of things which the human mind cannot fully penetrate: let us call them “the mysteries of being” (following Gabriel Marcel's terminology). We cannot fully know them not because they are obscure, but because our intellectual eye-sight is too weak. In such cases, we should humbly acknowledge our deficiency, and not lay the blame on the luminous object whose light is too strong for our weakness. On the other hand, some objects are truly opaque, and for this reason our mind cannot penetrate into them. You see that the two cases are, once again, at antipodes, and yet how tempting to confuse them and assume that the cause in both cases is identical.

I wonder whether the middle ages (which produced a Saint Anselm, a Giotti, a Dante, a Saint Thomas Aquinas, a Saint Bonaventure, a Duns Scottus, etc.) have been called the “dark ages” because their light was so strong that it blinded those looking at it. It is certainly amusing that the XVIII century called itself, “the age of enlightenment,” if we keep in mind that it has produced a Voltaire, a Rousseau, a Hume, a Diderot, etc. who—it seems to me—are dwarfs compared to their medieval counterparts. But this is off our topic. I have just yielded to the temptation to share this thought with you.

How important it is for all of us in human life to determine whether we are blinded by too much light, or whether we cannot see because we are surrounded by darkness. Once again, wisdom will be necessary, and I assume that you have decided to strive for it with every fiber of your being.
Renovación de la Alianza Bautismal

El Domingo, 21 de Abril, Domingo de Pascua, anunció y celebra el mistério central de nuestra Fe Católica, la Resurrección de Nuestro Salvador y Señor Jesucristo. Todavía tenemos unas semanas más de Cuaresma antes de que llege-mos a Semana Santa, pero es necesario, que durante la Cuaresma, mantengamos nuestros ojos fijos en la meta, es decir, caminando con Jesús en su sufrimiento para que también podamos compartir Su gloriosa Resurrección. En verdad, aquellos que ya han sido bautizados han sido ya unidos a esta Resurrección de Jesús en la más maravillosa y poderosa forma sacramental. Aquellos que se están preparando y estudiando para ser bautizados o quienes van a hacer su profesión de fe en la vigilia Pascual se les recuerda a través de los Ritos de Elección, celebrado este año en Santa María en Arcata y la Catedral en Santa Rosa, que la Cuaresma es un tiempo de preparación para recibir el Bautismo o para hacer su profesión de fe para entrar en la Iglesia Católica.

Las personas en toda la Diócesis que participan en esa preparación reconocen que se están preparando para hacer o renovar una Alianza Bautismal con Dios mismo. Esta misma actitud puede y debería ser adoptada por todos nosotros. Una de las acciones centrales por parte de los fieles Cristianos durante la Vigilia Pascual y en todas las misas del Domingo de Pascua es la Renovación de las Promesas Bautismales. En las Misas de Pascua esta Renovación substituye a la habitual Profesión de Fe. A menudo escuchamos que la Cuaresma es un tiempo de preparación para la Pascua y esto es cierto. Es un tiempo para entrar otra vez en el Misterio de Nuestra Resurrección que se logra por Jesús en la Cruz, en la Tumba y en su Resurrección de entre los muertos. Cada año, en el Cíclo Litúrgico Anual de la Iglesia, entramos en este período más intensamente de recordar y poner más atención a los sufrimientos que Nuestro Señor pasó por nuestra salvación. Unimos sus sufrimientos con nuestros propios sacrificios sinceros para estar plenamente comprometidos con Cristo y profundamente más dedicados a Él. No es posible orar y reflexionar sobre los sufrimientos de Cristo durante toda la Cuaresma sin llegar a una más profunda, más sincera, y más profunda unión de amor por aquel que se entregó por nosotros.

Entonces, nuestro trabajo en Cuaresma se convierte en una preparación para la Pascua. Esta renovación del Anual de Alianza Bautismal es algo mucho serio y nos llama a prestar mucha atención. Las promesas implican ambos un rechazo de Satanás y una afirmación de la fe básica. ¿Rechazas a Satanás? Esta es la primera pregunta. Respondemos automáticamente, Si. Sin embargo, es una pregunta seria y exige más que una respuesta automática. ¿Y todas sus obras? Esta es la siguiente pregunta. Esto nos llama a la oración y reflexión por adelantado. ¿Y todas sus falsas promesas? Esta es la tercera pregunta y además es una invitación para afirmar nuestro rechazo a todas las cosas que están separadas de Dios. Si la respuesta es simplemente automática, y no de lo más profundo del corazón, entonces podemos escuchar los ecos de la acusación en el Antiguo Testamento, “Este pueblo se acerca a mi con su boca, y con sus labios me honra, pero su corazón está lejos de mí” (Isaías 29:13). Este momento de Renovación, si debe ser un momento de gracia, debe involucrar conversión, y esto requiere preparación. En este sentido, toda la Cuaresma es una preparación para la Renovación de las Promesas Bautismales y un recomproetarse a nuestro Bautismo. El rechazo de quien no es Dios es la primera parte de las Promesas Bautismales. La segunda parte es la profesión de fe y se compone de tres partes o Profesión Trinitaria. Nos preguntan si creemos en Dios, Padre todopoderoso, en Jesus-cristo, Su único Hijo, nuestro Señor y en el Espíritu Santo. Nuestra respuesta decisiva a cada una, que debe ser más que automática, es SI. A la pregunta de si creemos en el Espíritu Santo esta adjunta una lista de otros principios de nuestra Fe las cuales están incluidas en nuestro Credo semanal. Y entonces escuchamos, ¿Crees en la santa iglesia Católica, la comunión de los santos, el perdón de los pecados, la resurrección de los muertos y la vida eterna? Toda nuestra observancia cuaresmal y nuestra participación en la Santa Misa durante todo el año, nuestro compromiso de vivir una vida de fe deben ser la manifestación directa de esta profesión de fe.

Se nos recuerda la cita del Papa Emérito Benedicto XVI al decir, “fijemos nuestros corazones en la gran esperanza que sobrepasa todo lo demás” —“la vida eterna.”

Preguntas al Diácono Mario

Diácono Mario Zúñiga

Cuáles son los aceites que se bendicen en la Misa Crismal?

Pregunta Raquel de la parroquia del Sagrado Corazón en Olinda.

El Obispo bendice tres clases de aceites: El aceite de los Catecúmenos, el aceite de los enfermos y se consagra el aceite de Crisma. Estos aceites son bendecidos en una misa especial durante la semana santa o cerca; esta misa es conocida como la Misa del Santo Crisma.

Un gran símbolo de unidad se expresa en esta Misa Crismal en la Catedral, debido a que los aceites son bendecidos en la Iglesia Madre de la arquidiócesis con la presencia de todos los sacerdotes de la arquidiócesis que se juntan alrededor de su Obispo, donde también ellos renuevan sus promesas sacerdotales.

El Obispo bendice los tres aceites, los cuales se distribuyen entre todas las parroquias para la vida Sacramental.

El aceite de los enfermos y de los Catecúmenos son aceites puros de oliva, mientras el aceite de Crisma es aceite de oliva mezclado con balsamo.

1. Aceite de los Enfermos, O+I (Oleum Infirmorum en latín) es usado en el Sacramento de la Unción de los enfermos.

2. Aceite de los Catecúmenos, O+S (Oleum Sanc- torum). Catecúmeno es una persona que desea recibir el bautismo, y que se hace instruir con este propósito. Este aceite es usado como unión Pre-bautismal. En el caso de los bautismos de infantes, la unión se lleva a cabo durante la celebración del Sacramento. Para el bautizo de adultos o nuevos convertidos al catolicismo que se han preparado en el programa del RICA (Rito de Iniciación Cristiana para Adultos), esta unión puede tomar lugar meses antes del bautismo.

3. Aceite del Santo Crisma, S+C (Sacram Chrism). Este aceite es muy especial y apartado de los otros dos. La palabra Crisma proviene de la palabra griega Christo, del cual obtenemos Cristo. Y Cristo significa “El Ungido”. (vea Diácono Mario, página 20)
Noticias

Se Cumplen 3 Años Del Fallecimiento De La Madre Angélica, Fundadora De EWTN

REDACCIÓN CENTRAL (ACI Prensa) - Un 27 de marzo como hoy, en 2016, falleció la Madre María Angélica de la Anunciación, religiosa clarisa fundadora de Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN), la cadena de televisión católica más grande del mundo.

La Madre Angélica falleció sobre las 5:00 p.m., a los 92 años, luego de luchar 15 años contra las secuelas de un derrame cerebral.

En julio de 2016, el Papa Francisco dijo que la Madre Angélica era "una mujer santa".

La religiosa fue sanada y el 3 de febrero de 1961, el Papa Pablo VI le dio como nombre "Madre Angélica". Ritma Rizzo—nombre que le dieron sus padres a su hija única.

Nació el 20 de abril de 1923 en Canton, Ohio (Estados Unidos). Su vida estuvo marcada por muchas pruebas, como el divorcio de sus padres cuando tenía seis años y la situación de pobreza que enfrentó junto a su madre. Cuando era adolescente se curó de un severo dolor estomacal luego de rezar una novena a Santa Teresa de Lisieux. "Ese fue el día que me di cuenta del amor de Dios por mí y me permites caminar de nuevo".

En enero de 1943 rezó una novena pidiendo que cesara la dolencia. El día 17, cuando despertó, el dolor había desaparecido por completo! Ella lo consideró un milagro y eso profundizó su relación con Dios.

4. Ingresó a su monasterio en secreto

Su madre se oponía a que fuera religiosa pero el llamado de Dios lo sentía tan intensamente que pese a todo decidió ingresar. Para evitar la resistencia de su madre Agnés, decidió marcharse de casa en secreto y fue directo al monasterio dejándole solo una nota a su mamá. En una parte decía lo siguiente: "Cuando reciba esta carta estará en Cleveland. He ingresado al Monasterio de la Adoración... Algo me pasó luego de la cura. No sé qué fue pero me enamoré por completo de Nuestro Señor. Vivir en el mundo los últimos 19 meses ha sido muy difícil. Te amo mucho y no he olvidado todo lo que has hecho por mí. Por favor confíen en El... Te pido bendigas para que pueda llegar a las alturas que anhelo. Te amo muchísimo!"

5. Casó quedó paralítica en un accidente cuando tenía algo más de 30 años

Después de hacer sus votos solemnones, un día estaba limpiando el piso con una lustradora eléctrica. Resbaló en el piso jabonoso y se golpeó muy fuerte contra una pared. El accidente afectó seriamente su espalda. En los meses siguientes su condición empeoró y el dolor se hizo insoportable. El día 17, cuando despertó, el dolor había desaparecido por completo! Ella lo consideró un milagro y eso profundizó su relación con Dios.

Papa Francisco: La Mediocridad Hace Que El Joven Sea Típico Y Sin Gusto

REDACCIÓN CENTRAL (ACI Prensa) - El Papa Francisco alertó a los jóvenes ante el riesgo de caer en la mediocridad, algo que convierte al joven, sin haber luchado en alguien “tibio y sin gusto”.

Así lo indicó el Santo Padre el sábado 23 de marzo en el diálogo que sostuvo en el Aula Pablo VI con un grupo de alumnos del Colegio Barbarigo de la localidad italiana de Padua. "En la juventud se aprende que en la vida nada es gratis. Debes mirar las metas, llegar a ellas. Gratuito solo es el amor de Dios, su gracia. Eso es gratuito porque El nos amará siempre, siempre; pero para ir adelante se requiere el esfuerzo de cada día", dijo el Santo Padre.

"No debemos cerrar los ojos ante las dificultades, sino rechazar aquellas cosas que te llevan a la mediocridad. Esta palabra, recuerdenla bien en el corazón: mediocridad", alertó Francisco. "Un joven mediocre (vea Noticias en Español, página 20)
Brutal Ataque Contra Activista Provida De 85 Años Ante Clínica De Abortos

REDACCIÓN CENTRAL (ACI Prensa) - Un sujeto golpeó salvajemente a un anciano activista provida de 85 años que se manifestaba pacíficamente ante una clínica de abortos de Planned Parenthood, en la ciudad estadounidense de San Francisco.

El hecho ocurrió el pasado 14 de marzo cuando el activista participaba pacíficamente en la iniciativa 40 Días Por La Vida. Según informa Life News, el agresor ya había atacado a la misma víctima y a otro hombre solo dos días antes.

El atacante, cuya identidad no se ha hecho pública aún, primero le quitó una pancarta al anciano para luego patearlo repetidamente en el suelo.

Watch this abortion activist repeatedly assault an elderly pro-life man.

La plataforma jurídica Life Legal ha asumido la defensa legal de la víctima. Allison Aranda, consultora senior y ex fiscal del año, aseguró que “este malévolo ataque contra nuestro anciano cliente es intolerable. Acudiremos a todas las instancias legales para que se haga justicia y para que se respete la libertad de hablar libremente—sin importar el mensaje—en los espacios públicos y sin que haya violencia física”.

“Como ex fiscal del distrito de San Francisco acusaré a todos los cargos legales al agresor y lo llevaré ante la justicia”, agregó.

Para la directora de Life Legal, Alexandra Snyder, es importante poner fin a la violencia, por lo que están “trabajando para asegurar que los activistas provida sean protegidos y que los perpetradores asuman la justicia”.

De otro lado, Shawn Carney, presidente de 40 Días Por La Vida, comentó que “mientras que los 800 mil voluntarios que participan en nuestras pacíficas vigilias de oración en el mundo han firmado una declaración de paz y siempre se han conducido respetando la ley, la violencia en los promotores del aborto se ha incrementado”.

Tras señalar que 40 Días por la Vida seguirá manifestándose públicamente, Carney dijo que quienes apoyan a Planned Parenthood “han vuelto a inspirar la intimidación, los insultos y la violencia”. Tienen una larga historia de no reconocer la dignidad del no nacido, algo que ahora parece aplican para un voluntario de 85 años.

Por su parte, Matt Britton consejero general de 40 Días por la Vida, expresó su esperanza en que “la gran ciudad de San Francisco, que alberga protestas de todo tipo, reconozca y proteja los principios elementales estadounidenses de libertad de expresión, investigando, prestando y castigando al vergonzoso atacante”. 

(Zúñiga es Diácono De Misión Dolores)
The Divine Mercy Novena

Jesus asked that the Feast of the Divine Mercy be preceded by a Novena to the Divine Mercy which would begin on Good Friday. He gave St. Faustina an intention to pray for on each day of the Novena, saving for the last day the most difficult intention of all, the lukewarm and indifferent of whom He said:

“These souls cause Me more suffering than any others; it was from such souls that My soul felt the most revulsion in the Garden of Olives. It was on their account that I said: ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass Me by.’ The last hope of salvation for them is to flee to My Mercy.”

In her diary, St. Faustina wrote that Jesus told her:

“On each day of the novena you will bring to My heart a different group of souls and you will immerse them in this ocean of My mercy... On each day you will beg My Father, on the strength of My passion, for the graces for these souls.”

The different souls prayed for on each day of the novena are:

**DAY 1 (Good Friday)** - All mankind, especially sinners

**DAY 2 (Holy Saturday)** - The souls of priests and religious

**DAY 3 (Easter Sunday)** - All devout and faithful souls

**DAY 4 (Easter Monday)** - Those who do not believe in Jesus and those who do not yet know Him

**DAY 5 (Easter Tuesday)** - The souls of separated brethren

**DAY 6 (Easter Wednesday)** - The meek and humble souls and the souls of children

**DAY 7 (Easter Thursday)** - The souls who especially venerate and glorify Jesus’ mercy

**DAY 8 (Easter Friday)** - The souls who are detained in purgatory;

**DAY 9 (Easter Saturday)** - The souls who have become lukewarm.

During the Solemn Novena leading to Divine Mercy Sunday, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy should be offered each day for the day’s intentions.

**First Day**

“Today bring to Me all mankind, especially all sinners, and immerse them in the ocean of My mercy. In this way you will console Me in the bitter grief into which the loss of souls plunges Me.”

Most Merciful Jesus, whose very nature it is to have compassion on us and to forgive us, do not look upon our sins but upon our trust which we place in Your infinite goodness. Receive us all into the abode of Your Most Compassionate Heart, and never let us escape from It. We beg this of You by that most wondrous love for the heavenly Father with which Your Heart unites You to the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Eternal Father, turn Your merciful gaze upon all mankind and especially upon poor sinners, all enfolded in the Most Compassionate Heart of Jesus. For the sake of His sorrowful Passion show us Your mercy, that we may pray the omnipotence of Your mercy for ever and ever. Amen.

**Second Day**

“Today bring to Me the Souls of Priests and Religious, and immerse them in Your unfathomable mercy. It was they who gave me strength to endure My bitter Passion. Through them as through channels My mercy flows out upon mankind.”

Most Merciful Jesus, from whom comes all that is good, increase Your graces in men and women consecrated to Your service, that they may perform worthy works of mercy; and that all who see them may glorify the Father of Mercy who is in heaven.

Eternal Father, turn Your merciful gaze upon all mankind and especially upon poor sinners, all enfolded in the Most Compassionate Heart of Jesus. For the sake of His sorrowful Passion show us Your mercy, that we may pray the omnipotence of Your mercy for ever and ever. Amen.

* In the original text, Saint Faustina uses the pronoun “us” since she was offering this prayer as a consecrated religious sister. The wording adapted here is intended to make the prayer suitable for universal use.

**Third Day**

“Today bring to Me all Devout and Faithful Souls, and immerse them in the ocean of My mercy. These souls brought me consolation on the Way of the Cross. They were a drop of consolation in the midst of an ocean of bitterness.”

Most Merciful Jesus, from the treasury of Your mercy, you impart Your graces in great abundance to each and all. Receive us into the abode of Your Most Compassionate Heart and never let us escape from It. We beg this grace of You by that most wondrous love for the heavenly Father with which Your Heart (see Divine Mercy Novena, page 22)
April 8th  
The Father’s Glory  
Young Adult Community Rohnert Park, CA. Faith discussion, 7pm 55U Newman Center. www. transformingfire.org coordinator@transformingfire.org

April 13th  
Pilgrimage Information St. Rose  
Pilgrimages Catholic Charities of California (CCC) is excited to be hosting walking pilgrimages in Spain along the Camino de Santiago, and in Italy along the Via Francigena, as well as non-walking pilgrimages visiting colonial Catholic churches in Cuba and following in the footsteps of martyrs in Mexico! These pilgrimages will change your life and support the work of Catholic Charities of California.  
Please join us for an informational meeting on Saturday, April 13, 2019, at 10:00 a.m. at St. Rose Church, Santa Rosa, or at 2:00 p.m. at St. Francis Solano Church, Sonoma. To RSVP for the meeting or, for more information, contact CCC pilgrim@catholiccharitiesca. org or call 916-766-1539 ext. 12.

Through April 14th  
St. Mary’s Arcata  
40 Days for Life, from March 6 to April 14, our community will take part in 40 DAYS FOR LIFE. Consider saying the rosary daily, attending Adoration, or standing on the corner to show support for Life.

Fourth Day  
“Today bring to Me those who do not believe in God and those who do not know Me, I was thinking also of them during My bitter Passion, and their future zeal comforted My Heart. Immerse them in the ocean of My mercy for endless ages. Amen.  

Fifth Day  
“Today bring to Me the Souls of those who have separated themselves from My Church*, and immerse them in the ocean of My mercy. During My bitter Passion they tore at My Body and Heart, that is, My Church. As they return to unity with the Church My wounds heal and in this way they alleviate My Passion.”

*Our Lord’s original words here were “heretics and schismatics,” since He spoke to Saint Faustina within the context of her times. As of the Second Vatican Council, Church authorities have seen fit not to use those designations in accordance with the explanation given in the Council’s Decree on Ecumenism (n.3). Every pope since the Council has reaffirmed that usage. Saint Faustina herself, her heart always in harmony with the mind of the Church, most certainly would have agreed. When at one time, because of the decisions of her superiors and father confessor, she was not able to execute Our Lord’s inspirations and orders, she declared: “I will follow You insofar as You will permit me to do so through Your representative. O my Jesus “I give priority to the voice of the Church over the voice with which You speak to me” (497). The Lord confirmed her action and praised her for it.

Divine Mercy Novena, cont. from page 21)  
burns so fiercely.  
Eternal Father, turn Your merciful gaze upon faithful souls, as upon the inheritance of Your Son. For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, grant them Your blessing and surround them with Your constant protection. Thus may they never fail in love or lose the treasure of the holy faith, but rather, with all the hosts of Angels and Saints, may they glorify Your boundless mercy for endless ages. Amen.

Sixth Day  
Today bring to Me the Meek and Humble Souls and the Souls of Little Children, and immerse them in My mercy. These souls most closely resemble My Heart. They strengthened Me during My bitter agony. I saw them as earthy Angels, who will keep vigil at My altars. I pour out upon them whole torrents of grace. I favor humble souls with My confidence.

To have your calendar event listed please email us! srndiocese1@gmail.com
Youth Day 2019 held at Cardinal Newman high school was unlike anything the young people, and their parents for that matter, had ever seen. They high end production of lights, sound, and video board wowed the audience immediately, as many asked themselves, “are we even in a gym?”

Brother Vic then shook the mental faculties of the crowd by presenting scientific explanations of God’s existence. His mantra that flew in the face of our existence just being happenstance: “Nothing can do nothing, because it is nothing.” The audience loved it, students left the day feeling they had an actual argument for why God exists.

Youth-group-ministries over the years have shared the faith in a “church is cool because Jesus is your buddy” mentality, but young people and their families haven’t found church as a place to wrestle with real-life questions. Brother Vic chose to hammer the audience with the idea that God exists, He loves you, and His Grace and Mercy is abundant. His message was followed by a personal testimony coughed in the Cardinal Newman worship band’s rendition of “So Will I” by the internationally acclaimed group Hillsong.

The song “So Will I” was the day’s theme, and accentuated the idea that if God is author and creator of the universe - and if time, space, and earth all obey him - then we should too. Rhyan Ramirez hosted the day’s additional inspirational speakers and activities that concluded with a silent 20minutes of Eucharistic Adoration and a few hours of Confession. Yes, 500 people were quiet in a gym before the Blessed Sacrament.

Stay in the know with Youth Ministry and Young Adult Ministry events throughout the diocese: www.sryouth.org

“Faith, Hops, and Love”
May 14th 5:30 - 8:30 at Lagunitas. A fundraiser for the programs of the Diocese Youth and Young Adult Ministry office. Come enjoy a night of fellowship and see all that we are up to.

For more info/tickets: www.faithhopslove.org

(Divine Mercy Novena, cont. from page 22)

Bliss the whole world, that all souls together may sing out the praises of Your mercy for endless ages. Amen.

Seventh Day
Today bring to Me the Souls who especially venerate and glorify My Mercy*, and immerse them in My mercy. These souls sorrowed most over my Passion and entered most deeply into My spirit. They are living images of My Compassionate Heart. These souls will shine with a special brightness in the next life. Not one of them will go into the fire of hell. I shall particularly defend each one of them at the hour of death.

Most Merciful Jesus, whose Heart is Love Itself, receive into the abode of Your Most Compassionate Heart the souls of those who particularly extol and venerate the greatness of Your mercy. These souls are mighty with the very power of God Himself. In the midst of all afflictions and adversities they go forward, confident of Your mercy; and united to You, O Jesus, they carry all mankind on their shoulders. These souls will not be judged severely, but Your mercy will embrace them as they depart from this life.

Eternal Father, turn Your merciful gaze upon the souls who glorify and venerate Your greatest attribute, that of Your fathomless mercy, and who are enclosed in the Most Compassionate Heart of Jesus. These souls are a living Gospel; their hands are full of deeds of mercy, and their hearts, overflowing with joy, sing a canticle of mercy to You, O Most High! I beg You O God:

Show them Your mercy according to the hope and trust they have placed in You. Let there be accomplished in them the promise of Jesus, who said to them that during their life, but especially at the hour of death, the souls who will venerate this fathomless mercy of His, He, Himself, will defend as His glory. Amen.

“The text leads one to conclude that in the first prayer directed to Jesus, Who is the Redeemer, it is “victim” souls and contemplatives that are being prayed for; those persons, that is, that voluntarily offered themselves to God for the salvation of their neighbor (see Col 1:24; 2 Cor 4:12). This explains their close union with the Savior and the extraordinary efficacy that their invisible activity has for others. In the second prayer, directed to the Father from whom comes “every worthwhile gift and every genuine benefit,” we recommend the “active” souls, who promote devotion to The Divine Mercy and exercise with it all the other works that lend themselves to the spiritual and material uplifting of their brethren.

Eighth Day
“Today bring to Me the Souls who are in the prison of Purgatory, and immerse them in the abyss of My mercy. Let the torrents of My Blood cool down their scorching flames. All these souls are greatly loved by Me. They are making retribution to My justice. It is in your power to bring them relief. Draw all the indulgences from the treasury of My Church and offer them on their behalf. Oh, if you only knew the tortures they suffer, you would continually offer for them the alms of the spirit and pay off their debt to My justice.”

Most Merciful Jesus, You Yourself have said that You desire mercy; so I bring into the abode of Your Most Compassionate Heart the souls in Purgatory, souls who are very dear to You, and yet, who must make retribution to Your justice. May the streams of Blood and Water which gushed forth from Your Heart put out the flames of Purgatory, that there, too, the power of Your mercy may be celebrated.

Eternal Father, turn Your merciful gaze upon the souls suffering in Purgatory, who are enclosed in the Most Compassionate Heart of Jesus. I beg You, by the sorrowful Passion of Jesus Your Son, and by all the bitterness with which His most sacred Soul was flooded: Manifest Your mercy to the souls who are under Your just scrutiny. Look upon them in no other way but only through the Wounds of Jesus, Your dearly beloved Son; for we firmly believe that there is no limit to Your goodness and compassion. Amen.

Ninth Day
“Today bring to Me the Souls who have become Luke-warm, and immerse them in the abyss of My mercy. These souls wound My Heart most painfully. My soul suffered the most dreadful loathing in the Garden of Olives because of lukewarm souls. They were the reason I cried out: ‘Father, take this cup away from Me, if it be Your will.’ For them, the last hope of salvation is to run to My mercy.”

Most compassionate Jesus, You are Compassion Itself. I bring lukewarm souls into the abode of Your Most Compassionate Heart. In this fire of Your pure love, let these tepid souls who, like corpses, filled You with such deep loathing, be once again set aflame. O Most Compassionate Jesus, exercise the omnipotence of Your mercy and draw them into the very ardor of Your love, and bestow upon them the gift of holy love, for nothing is beyond Your power.

Eternal Father, turn Your merciful gaze upon lukewarm souls who are nonetheless enfolded in the Most Compassionate Heart of Jesus. Father of Mercy, I beg You by the bitter Passion of Your Son and by His three-hour agony on the Cross: Let them, too, glorify the abyss of Your mercy. Amen.
On Palm Sunday, Where Will the Millions of Palms Come from?

By Adelaide Mena Washington DC, CNA March 16, 2016

With the arrival of Palm Sunday, Catholics across the globe will soon be handed spiky leaves as they walk into church. Some might fold them into elaborate little crosses. Kids will poke each other with them. But it's safe to say most won't know where they came from.

The feast commemorates Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem the week before his passion and crucifixion. The Gospels attest that as Jesus entered the city, crowds lay down palm branches and cloaks as he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey.

For centuries, Christians have commemorated the feast day that begins Holy Week by waving branches of either palm or another local tree, as well as with liturgical processions and other celebrations.

In the United States and Canada, most parishes will celebrate Palm Sunday by blessing and distributing palm branches to the faithful. That makes millions of palm leaves each year—and that doesn't include all of the Protestant churches that observe the tradition.

Where do all those palms come from? While many Catholics know the final destination of their palms—they are burned to become ashes for next year's Ash Wednesday—the origin of the leafy branches is less well known.

The journey from tree to church begins with the harvesters around the world who cut and prepare the leaves for their role in worship. The work needed to provide palms for Palm Sunday is so immense that it actually constitutes a full-time year-round job for some harvesters.

Thomas Sowell is one such palm harvester from Florida who has been helping to supply parishes with fresh palm leaves for more than five decades. Sowell began harvesting wild palm leaves from trees as a child to earn extra money in the springtime. Over the past several decades, he has grown his business into a palm supplier that ships the leafy branches to all 50 states and Canada.

Despite the growth in his business, Sowell says he tries to maintain his focus on the purpose behind it all.

“We try to do the best job that we can,” he told CNA. “Every bag that we send out to churches, every individual bag has been examined, cleaned—we go to extreme measures to make sure that everything we do for these churches is done in the honor of Jesus Christ.”

While there are more than 2,600 different species of palm that grow across the world, palm plants cannot survive outside of tropical and subtropical climates. Historically, parishes that could not source palm locally would instead substitute branches of another local tree such as olive or willow, although modern churches also have the option of sourcing palm fronds from other regions of the world.

In the United States and Canada, most parishes seek out suppliers who deliver fresh palms shortly before Palm Sunday, said Fr. Michael J. Flynn, Secretary of Divine Worship for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Many of these parishes contact church goods suppliers such as Peter Munley of Falls Church, Virginia, who helps provide parishes year-round with supplies like candles and sacramental wine, along with palms for Holy Week.

Munley told CNA that in preparation for Palm Sunday, he works to deliver palms from their source to different parishes that place orders around the country. In addition to Florida, palms are sourced from Texas, California and elsewhere in the Southern United States, he said.

While nearly all of the palms Munley sells are individually pre-cut, church goods suppliers also help to source decorative palms for altar centerpieces and larger palm fronds as well. Dealers also work to ensure that palms get burnt and ground into ashes for Ash Wednesday, for parishes that cannot burn the palms for ashes themselves.

Munley also stressed that although many American-based palm sources are not labeled as “eco-friendly,” the practices of many major U.S. palm harvesters are indeed environmentally sustainable.

“Our guys don’t kill the palm,” he said, adding that by sourcing palms from American harvesters as opposed to internationally-certified “green” farmers, they help to reduce the ecological impact of shipping and transportation.

Sowell said that the palm trees he works with “are 100 percent wild.” He works with local ranchers and landowners to remove palmetto leaves from trees that grow naturally on local farmland.

Some of the trees Sowell harvests from have been producing palm leaves since he first started gathering palm leaves to sell as a boy.

“I know that there are trees that are still being cut today that I cut when I was twelve,” he said.

Originally, Sowell cut everything himself. Over the years, however, his growing cooperation with the caretakers who supply palm led him to focus more on preparing palms for church supply dealers and for shipment.

Cooperation with ranchers and landowners is critical, Sowell says the process of cutting, cleaning and preparing the strips of palm is incredibly labor intensive, and he could not complete it without local partnerships. “There’s no way that you could grow this much palm and just do it (alone). It’s hard.”

The work is so intensive that the Palm Sunday celebrations require an entire year’s work. “We work twelve months out of the year, in one aspect or another, for one day,” Sowell said.

He also supplies palm leaves for Eastern Orthodox Churches, which use a different calendar for Easter and Lent. After the celebration of Palm Sunday in the Catholic Church and other Western churches, “we’ll turn around in a couple of weeks and gather more palms so they’re fresh for the Orthodox,” he said.

The participation of Christians in Palm Sunday celebrations not only provides work and a living for Sowell and his employees, but financial support for the local ranchers who work with him.

“There are so many families that help us that can earn money in a way that otherwise they couldn’t.”

Ultimately, Sowell sees his job harvesting and preparing palm leaves—and the service he is able to offer to parishes across the country—as a blessing.

“There would have been no way we could have done this if it hadn’t been for God helping us,” he said.