US Bishops Meet in Baltimore

Baltimore—At its biannual meeting November 10-13, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops discussed a wide range of issues, including immigration reform, avoiding cooperation with evil in health care partnerships, and a possible English translation of an ecclesiastical ritual book.

Opening thoughts
The conference opened with an address by the papal nuncio to the United States Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, who told his brother bishops the young are “crying out” for a challenge, and the Church must answer through saintly witness.

“We should ask ourselves,” he said, “why young people, submerged into the culture of these times, so often called the ‘culture of death,’ are settling among the most excessive and challenging experiences which some of them imagine to find, even as far as the aberrations of ISIS.

“Obviously young America is searching for something or perhaps someone to lead them beyond the frustrations they experience every day. They are looking well beyond just so-called happiness. They are searching for meaning and purpose to their existence.

“What meaning and purpose young people can find in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit is asking for is essential if a fully graced benefit is to be derived from the consultation. Without some degree of national uniformity I do not know how anyone who received all of that information would make sense of it.”

It’s Official! Pope Francis Announces 2015 Visit to US

Vatican City (CNA/EWTN News)—In mid-November, Pope Francis officially announced he will visit the United States in September 2015 for the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia.

“I wish to confirm, if God wills it, that in September of 2015, I will go to Philadelphia for the Eighth World Meeting of Families,” he announced at Vatican City’s Synod Hall November 17 during his remarks defending marriage at an international colloquium on the complementarity of man and woman.

The Philadelphia World Meeting of Families will take place from September 22-27. Even before the Pope’s announcement, the meeting was expected to draw tens of thousands of people. Archbishop Charles J. Chaput of Philadelphia had told a gathering of Catholic bishops last month a papal visit would likely result in crowds of about 1 million.

A global Catholic event, the world meeting seeks to support and strengthen families. St. John Paul II founded the event in 1994, and it takes place every three years.

Diocesan Finance Council: An “Invaluable Service”

by Samuel T. Crump, Sr.

The Diocese of Santa Rosa consists of six counties in northwest California, over 800 lay employees, 62 active priests, 41 parishes, 18 missions, 11 schools, two Newman Centers, plus Catholic Charities, Catholic Cemeteries, and various ministries.

The chancery—or curia—administers various functions for the diocese. Almost 80 percent of its budget gets spent on insurance and employee benefits for the entire diocese and is funded by all the parishes, schools, and other bodies.

That is a lot of moving parts, not to mention a lot of money to manage. So who helps the bishop and curia do so?

As far as finances go: The Diocesan Finance Council. The council is a consultative body that advises Bishop Robert F. Vasa and chancery staff on managing fiscal affairs. It has fifteen members from around the diocese, three of whom are clergy.

It meets five times a year at the chancery in Santa Rosa. A summary of the chancery’s financial statements are provided annually in the North Coast Catholic. The full financial report is available on the diocesan website.
Dado que este es el último North Coast Catholic (artículo) antes de Navidad, sin duda quiero aprovechar la oportunidad para desearles a todos los que son lectores habituales de esta columna un alegre y bendito resto de Adviento, un adornado similar de los 12 días de la Navidad, y un Feliz Nuevo Año.

El tiempo de Adviento es uno en el que, a través de un proceso gradual, poco a poco abrimos las puertas del día de Navidad. Cada una iluminada a su tiempo, las cuatro velas de Adviento simbolizan ese proceso gradual. Primero es una vela, y estará así por una semana. A continuación, la segunda vela, de nuevo por una semana. Poco a poco nos acostumbramos a la luz, y nos comienza a gustar, y buscamos más. Buscamos la tercera y cuarta vela. Buscamos a Cristo nuestro verdadero Luz.

La Luz de Cristo, en otras palabras, no hace precisamente rayos de luz sobre nosotros con asombrosa rapidez. Es una dispersión suave de la oscuridad como un amanecer.

Todo esto es irónico, en cierto sentido, porque los días de diciembre no son días de gran luz, verdad? Son días de luz abreviada, de amaneceres más tardes y anocheceres más temprano. Del mismo modo mucho de lo que está sucediendo en el mundo proyecta una larga sombra. De alguna manera, en medio de todo esto la esperanza de la Iglesia, la alegría de la Navidad, la presencia de Cristo en nuestra verdadera Luz.

Este Adviento observamos varias celebraciones alegres alrededor de la diócesis. Tal vez lo más destacado de ellos es la procesión de la peregrinación de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe celebrada el día de su santo, que será de la iglesia de Santa Rosa en Santa Rosa a iglesia de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe en Windsor. No será la peregrinación de cientos- de- millas que se encuentra, por ejemplo, en México, pero si trae esta tradición a la mente y la honra.

Siempre es más refrescante y rejuvenecedor para ver cómo las familias hispanas de la diócesis celebran con gran alegría y devoción el santo de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe.

Al ver las celebraciones que giran en torno a la conmemoración de este evento siempre me han sostenido con asombro en la hermosa sencillez y la profundidad de la fe de las familias hispanas, del poder y el valor de las devociones, y de la belleza de dar voz y la expresión de la fe que tuvo lugar en nuestros corazones.

A veces me pregunto cómo habría yo respondido a un Juan Diego en la puerta de mi casa, y me temo que yo se la respuesta. Me pregunto cómo habría respondido al mensaje de los pastores en Belén, y me temo que yo se la respuesta. Me pregunto cómo estoy siendo llamado ahora
Dr. Mary Lyons

Five years ago, in the spring 2009 edition, we reported that the Association of Contemplative Sisters had unanimously elected Dr. Mary Lyons, PhD, as its new president.

Formed in 1969, ACS initially consisted of 53 heads of female monasteries, convents, and abbeys who recognized in light of the Second Vatican Council’s reforms a need to update the formation of new people entering their houses. Eventually membership was opened to laywomen who have a commitment to life a contemplative of contemplative prayer.

The ACS presidency is a two-year term, with most presidents serving two terms. Dr. Lyons however just completed her third term, becoming the first president to serve that long.

A marriage and family therapist as well as a longtime and very active member of St. Leo Church in Boyes Hot Springs, all of her children went to St. Eugene School and Ursuline High School. Furthermore, she has served on the diocesan review board since 2013.

In addition to her doctorate in clinical psychology, Dr. Lyons has a master’s in theology from the University of San Francisco. ❖

Where Are They Now?

Maggie Wessell

In the spring 2005 edition of this publication, we reported on an award received by a seventh grader name Maggie Wessell of St. John the Baptist School and Church in Napa. The Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) had held an essay contest and given the theme, “Along the Trail with Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery, May 1804-September 1806.” Maggie wrote her essay from the perspective of Sacagawea, Lewis and Clark’s translator and guide. For her effort, the DAR awarded her first place, which earned her $100, a certificate, and a medal.

In 2006 Maggie entered Napa High School, where she became an outstanding athlete, lettering in both basketball and volleyball, and was her class’ valedictorian.

In 2010 she entered the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Besides studying bioengineering, she also made time for intramural sports.

After graduating this past summer, she entered a one-year master’s program in bioengineering at Rice University in Houston. And just recently she accepted a job with a San Francisco-based technology consulting firm where she says she will use she has learned.

“It’s nice to have it lined up and know where I’m going to be,” says Maggie, and then adds with a chuckle, “I’m very organized, so it’s nice to have a plan.”

When asked where she learned her writing skills that earned her the 2004 award, she primarily credits her mother Denise. But she also recognizes the influence of her sixth grade teacher Stephanie Quinlan, a fellow St. John’s alumnna who now serves as principal of St. Vincent de Paul School in Petaluma.

Although an increasing number of young adults fall away from the Church after leaving home, this blessedly is not true of Wessell. To hear her tell it, she’s stronger than ever in her beliefs.

“At UCLA I would walk to the Catholic students center,” she says, “and going to Mass, it was [a refuge] from all the stress at school. It was nice to have that, and it was a break and a time to separate myself from all the anxiety and stress I had with school.

“Especially with moving to Texas and a new place where I don’t know anyone, the Catholic student center here is so welcoming, and I’ve met a lot of people through there. It’s been really helpful, and I’m even more involved there. So now I’m a leader.

“As I’ve grown older,” Wessell continues, “my walk with Christ] has become less of something I’m doing because of my parents. It’s not just because they told me. You learn to question a lot of things in college. But looking at my faith from this renewed kind of perspective actually has drawn me closer, and I feel it even more strongly now than I did when I did growing up, because it means a lot more now. It makes more sense.”

Part of what has helped redouble her connection to the Faith is her having to defend it to a close friend who questioned her about various Church teachings. She says it made her “look into certain things. It challenged me. It made me learn how to back up what I believe and say I believe.”

The Holy Innocents, Feast: December 28

Catholic Words to Know

Congregation for the Causes of the Saints: The Vatican dicastery responsible for reviewing the causes of potential saints and making recommendations to the Holy Father regarding those causes.

Dicastery: One of the offices or bureaucracies through which the Pope administers the Church.

Apostolic nuncio: Sometimes called a papal nuncio, this term means the Holy See’s ambassador or representative to nations with which it has diplomatic relations. In countries where no formal embassy exists, the Pope’s representative is called an apostolicdelegate.

Tonsure: The cutting or shaving of hair as a sign of religious devotion and humility.

Venerable: Declaring someone venerable is the second of four steps in the canonization process. If someone earns this distinction, it means the Holy Father has determined that person lived a life of heroic virtue, that is, they lived the cardinal and theological virtues to a heroic degree. Thus their life is worth venerating, their example worth following.
Tis Better to Give

It’s most wonderful time of the year. At least it is for many, possibly most.

For others, though, the tsunami of materialism and consumerism that relentlessly assaults us in these weeks is just a reminder that money, gifts, goods, even food and drink cannot make us happy and in the end are often a fools pursuit.

This thought is occasioned by four articles I saw on the same day last month.

One concerned a man who had been a successful IT project manager. His company laid him off, and he couldn’t make his rent. He now lives in his car. He will spend Christmas spent in that vehicle. He had it all and lost it. Wealth is not necessarily permanent.

But it’s not only the absence of money that can make a person miserable. Sometimes having it is just as bad. Harold Hamm, Oklahoma’s richest man with a net worth of $18 billion, just finished an acrimonious divorce where the judge ordered him to turn over $1 billion to his ex-wife Sue Ann in “cash and assets.” Sue Ann says that’s not enough and plans to appeal.

According to The West Australian, billionaire Gina Rinehart, Australia’s richest citizens, with a net worth of US $17 billion, is at risk of having three-quarters of her wealth taken away. The reason: Rinehart’s estranged children are suing her. The “two children are seeking substantive profits and the setting up of legal trust arrangements for” two mining operations director for the Diocese of Santa Rosa, California.

From the Editor

Brian O’Neel is communications director for the Diocese of Santa Rosa, California.

Letters to the Editor

[Editor's note: This reflection on the passing of Fr. Wil Sheehy came in too late for inclusion in his obituary. Father died last month.]

Fr. Sheehy was very faithful in keeping contact with both Sr. Janet and me. I especially remember his faithful dog Jake. Once he called over to the convent saying it was Jake’s birthday, and he would be bringing over some birthday cake for us to enjoy.

Many times when the kids were on the playground, he would go by being pulled by Jake who was a large, strong animal. The kids would comment that Jake was taking a walk with Fr. Sheehy. But it was more a reminder that money, gifts, goods, even food and drink cannot make us happy and in the end are often a fools pursuit.

A grace-filled Advent and Merry Christmas to everyone, and thank you for reading. God bless you.

Letters Policy

Email: diocesesantarosa@yahoo.com
Write: Letters to the Editor
North Coast Catholic
985 Airway Ct.
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

Name, address, parish attended, 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.

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Most Rev. Robert F. Vasa
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Brian O’Neel
EDITOR
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FR. FRANCIS DE SALES, PRIEST FOR US!

St. Nicholas of Myra, Feast: December 6
#AwesomeFamilyChristmas

Do you love Facebook? I do! It gives me a great way to stay connected with cousins, nieces, and nephews, and it lets me have a peek into their daily lives in spite of living so far apart. I get to see what makes them happy, what makes them sad, and it’s important to them. These little glimpses make me feel like I am still part of their lives, even if it is in such a miniscule way.

I have friends from high school and from different jobs with whom I have lost touch over the years. It is so much fun to reconnect on Facebook, see how they have changed, and see how their families have grown. Say what you want about social media, but I love Facebook!

The other part that is fascinating is what people post. Some articles or videos have a definite political bias (interesting to see who turned out liberal or conservative!). Others have a definite religious bias. It’s funny how some of the biggest potheads back in high school are now strong in their religious fervor, a change that makes me smile. God can change the hardest hearts!

Today I watched an interesting video on Facebook. Moms were asked what kind of parent they thought they were. Then they got to listen to what their children said about them. Tissues were required to watch it!

What struck me was that the moms talked about their tempers, how strict they are, and all wished they had more patience and listened more.

The children on the other hand talked about how loving their moms are, how they do things together, and several called their moms their hero.

Afterward I sat thinking, ‘What would my children say about me? What do I wish was different about me as a mom, and what would my children say I do right?’ And because of these reflections, I have resolved to do something differently.

Advent and Christmastide are a crazy, busy time. It’s easy to get stressed and impatient. My family—all four children—will be home this year. We won’t go anywhere or stay in someone else’s house. This year we’ll spend time just being, just enjoying each other, reveling in each other’s presence.

Maybe we will go for walks or play a game or cook together or create. Oh, sure, we’ll attend Mass, eat, exchange gifts, and take pictures. This year, though, I want to ensure we just enjoy each other as well. We will be a family and enjoy it. Even if I have to force it! LOL.

So what’s my suggestion this month for raising happy, secure, safe children? Resolve to spend time just being with your family. Let go of the hassles and just be. Revel in the moments of time invested in each other, listening, talking, hugging, and breathing. I promise you won’t regret it.

Then post it on Facebook so the rest of the world can stay connected with cousins, nieces, and nephews, and it makes them sad, and what is important to them. These little glimpses make me feel like I am still part of their lives, even if it is in such a miniscule way.

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Then post it on Facebook so the rest of the world can join in! Some of us find our best ideas there! ✓
Sunday, October 26, was a special day for four of our diocese's seminarians attending their first year at St. Gregory the Great Seminary in Philadelphia, Nebraska. Gabriel Sanchez Navarro, Sean Ryan, John Plass, and Brendan Warner were among 23 new men at the seminary to receive and begin to wear the cassock, marking a milestone in their progress towards the priesthood.

The cassock is the black, ankle-length garment worn by Roman-rite priests and seminarians as a sign of their simplicity of life and their death to the world in order to rise in Christ. It is still the regular clerical dress for priests and religious in much of the Catholic world. That is, it is not something that went out with the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council.

Prior to Cassock Day, all new seminarians wore a suit and tie to chapel, meals, and classes. However now the unity of purpose and fraternity among every seminarian in the house tie to chapel, meals, and classes. However now the unity of purpose and fraternity among every seminarian in the house is able to show forth through the wearing of clerical attire. The investiture replaces the rite of tonsure, which is able to show forth through the wearing of clerical attire.

Wearing the soutane—another word for cassock—helps the seminarians to develop their priestly identity and grow in their formation for the priesthood of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The investiture renews the rite of tonsure, which the Holy See suppressed in 1972. St. Gregory the Great Seminary is one of only two seminaries in the nation to the Holy See suppressed in 1972. St. Gregory the Great Seminary is one of only two seminaries in the nation to use the investiture ceremony. The other is St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Philadelphia.

Sean Ryan, John Plass, and Brendan Warner were among 23 new men at the seminary to receive and begin to wear the cassock on for the first time was natural. That is, it felt right. From now on I’ll wear the [same] garb many men before me have worn. Now I must follow in their footsteps and give my all to Christ and His Bride. A few friends and family members traveled to join the seminarians for the afternoon and share in the joyful occasion. During the week leading up to the day of investiture, the entire seminary community helped the new men prepare for this significant event, which included participation in a silent retreat. The other seminarians studying at St. Gregory for our diocese—Peter Coelho-Kostolny, Daniel Sanchez, and Thomas Stuart—received their cassocks in a similar way during their first year, 2012.

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**Diocesan Seminarians Receive Cassocks**

*by Mr. John Plass*

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**Prayers for Priests Calendar**

_A project of the Santa Rosa Diocesan Council of Catholic Women_

Join daily by saying at least one prayer for the Priest of the day.

_Loving Father, bless our Priests and let the Radiance of your love embrace Father _______________________. _O Lord, our God, with love and care you provided companions to the apostles to assist them in teaching and proclaiming that you are with us._

_O Jesus, I pray for Your faithful and fervent priests; for Your unfaithful and tepid priests; for Your priests laboring at home or abroad in distant mission fields; for Your tempted priests; for Your lonely and desolate priests; for Your sick priests; for Your aged priests; for Your dying priests; for the souls of Your priests in purgatory._

But above all I commend to You the priests dearest to me: the priest who baptized me; the priest who absolved me from my sins; the priest at whose Masses I assisted and who gave me Your Body and Blood in Holy Communion; the priest who taught and instructed me or helped me and encouraged me; all the priests to whom I am indebted in any other way, particularly (priest’s name here). _O Jesus, keep them all close to Your heart, and bless them abundantly in time and in eternity. Amen._

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_A Prayer for Priests_

_O almighty and eternal God, look upon the face of Your Christ and for love of Him Who is the eternal high priest, have pity on Your priests. Remember, O most compassionate God, that they are but weak and frail human beings. Stir up in them the grace of their vocation which is in them by the imposition of the bishop’s hands. Keep them close to You lest the enemy prevail against them so they may never do anything in the slightest degree unworthy of their sublime vocation._

_O Jesus, I pray for Your faithful and fervent priests; for Your unfaithful and tepid priests; for Your priests laboring at home or abroad in distant mission fields; for Your tempted priests; for Your lonely and desolate priests; for Your sick priests; for Your aged priests; for Your dying priests; for the souls of Your priests in purgatory._

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Year of Consecrated Life Opens

Rome—In November of last year, the Holy Father met with the superiors general of men's religious orders.

At first it seemed like it would be typical of this sort of meeting. The Pope would give an address, a representative of the superiors would give his own talk, and maybe a gift would be presented His Holiness at the end.

During the session, the Pope spoke about how religious congregations enrich diocesan life. He encouraged members to go out to "frontiers," working first and foremost with people excluded from society.

He stressed the importance of dialogue with local communities to better adapt the Church's teachings into their ways of life.

When it came to formation of religious members, the Pope said to avoid hypocrisy and clericalism, to develop "a tender heart."

"He later thanked the religious, saying: "Thank you, for what you do and for your spirit of faith and your quest for service. Thanks for your testimony, and also for the humiliations you have to endure."

And then he broke from the script in a sense by calling for a year dedicated to the consecrated life, that is, the life of religious brothers, nuns, and sisters.

The Year of Consecrated Life proclaimed by Pope Francis began on the first Sunday of Advent, November 30, 2014, and it ends February 2, 2016, traditionally Candlemas, but also the World Day of Consecrated Life.

A few months after proclaiming the Year, Pope Francis told a group of religious that today's religious men and women need to be prophetic, "capable of waking up the people." He told religious people to avoid hypocrisy and clericalism, to develop "a tender heart."

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Here in the United States, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations is promoting "Days with Religious" initiatives and resources to help families learn about the consecrated life of religious men and women. Activities will focus on sharing experiences of prayer, service and community life with those living a consecrated life.

The "Days with Religious" activities will represent great opportunities for families and adults to look at the many ways men and women serve Christ and the Church while answering the call to live in consecrated life," said Bishop Michael F. Burbidge of Raleigh, North Carolina, chairman of the USCCB Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations.


Of course it is not only in the United States that the year will be observed. For instance, despite persecution and threats faced by the Catholic faithful in Syria, religious communities in the war-torn country have continued their initiatives to proclaim the message of the Gospel.

On October 31, some 50 men and women religious from 16 different congregations of consecrated life met in Damascus with Bishop Georges Abou Khazen, vicar apostolic of Aleppo, and Archbishop Mario Zenari, apostolic nuncio to Syria to plan how they would all observe the year-long commemoration.

"They" includes some remarkable people such as Sr. Maria of Nazareth, IVE an Argentine Sister with the Institute of the Incarnate Word, who moved to Aleppo, Syria, in August in the middle of the civil war to minister to local Christians despite the danger posed by ISIS and al-NUara.

She has been ministering to a traumatized Christian community in the former million-strong metropolis in the north of the country, which has suffered some of the worst violence of the three-year-old civil war.

Previously based in the Gaza Strip, Sister Maria has seen her share of violence.

"Our task in this country is very special. We are constantly confronted with people's suffering. The war is having a profoundly deleterious effect on human dignity. People are losing their loved ones, their freedom and their rights due to the violence. On top of this there is poverty and a lack of the most basic things, such as electricity and water," the young religious reports.

When asked how the Marian Sisters of Santa Rosa (MSSR) intend to celebrate the year, Mother Superior Teresa Christine Johnson says the Sisters will visit schools and parish youth groups during the in order to give mini-lessons on the purpose and meaning of consecrated life.

Mother also says they hope "to renew in [their] own hearts a deeper understanding and living of [their] consecrated lives through prayer and study."

Finally the MSSRs hope to host a discernment retreat, says Mother, somewhere in the diocese for young women who are interested in learning how to discern their vocations.

Br. James Joost, FSC, superior of the LaSallian Brothers, says his order will kick off the year with a prayer service that connects "the Year of Consecrated Life with one of the memorial events of our Lasallian heritage, what we call the 'Heroic Vow.'"

This commemorates November 21, 1691, when the order's founder St. John Baptist de La Salle and two other Brothers professed a vow to do whatever it would take to give young people "the benefit of an education as a means to salvation."

Area Lady Finds Her Vocation in Michigan

Santa Rosa—The Marian Sisters are growing. Their most recent addition is a local young lady, Sr. Marissa Zieminski, daughter of longtime active St. Eugene Cathedral parishioners George and Pam Zieminski.

Sister kindly consented to the following interview with North Coast Catholic.

What attracted you to religious life?

When I was a young girl, I had the thought that I would like to be a nun after reading saint stories and seeing pictures of nuns. But I lost that conviction, partly because I did not see any Sisters around here. It was an unrealistic path.

However, when I met the Marian Sisters three years ago, I started to think about it again. I could see that they were normal people like me who wanted to give everything they had to Jesus so that He could do wonderful things through them.

Why the MSSR?

There are many different orders out there, and each has its own charism, a way of living out their consecration to God. The Marian Sisters' charism fits exactly what I want to do with my life.

Also I want thank my diocese, which has helped to raise me in the Faith and given me the sacraments. By entering this order here in Santa Rosa, I can especially pray for and work in my own diocese.

Right now, I'm a postulant, meaning I'll continue discerning God's will and see if this is really where He wants me for the rest of my life.

Relatively speaking, it's very rare that young people answer a call to religious life. Why is this, what can be done about it, and what factors came together so you could hear this call?

Yes, it's been relatively rare, but I do think it's becoming more common as young people see the value and beauty of religious life.

Religious life is a visible witness to the reality and importance of heaven as the reward for our faithfulness and love for God here on earth, and that there's a purpose to life. Most importantly I want to use my gifts and my love for this vocation.

Young people, when deciding where to go to college or what to do in life, often don't consider a priestly or religious vocation. It's important that parents, teachers, and pastors discuss this with the young people around them.

In my discernment, I had a few people, including my pastor, ask me if I'd considered the religious life. That made me think about where my life was going, what I would do with it, and most importantly, what God wanted me to do with it.

My parents also were open to it, and I knew I had their support [no matter which vocation I chose]. God showed me through prayer where He wanted me to go.

How would you respond to those who'd say, "You could've found a good Catholic man to marry, had beautiful children together, and a career, too. Yet you made this choice. Why?"

Yes, I could've had all of this, but I wouldn't have been as happy as I am in the religious life.

God calls us to the place where we'll be happiest, even if sometimes it involves sacrifice. Marriage is beautiful, and I wouldn't be a normal young lady if I didn't want a husband and children. However, God is calling me to give up these good things on earth so I can be more available for what He has in mind for me.

When loving Christ with all my heart, I can then love everyone as He loves them. It is a realistic, wonderful vocation, and what better way of living your life than in the complete service of the One you love? 

Marian Sisters of Santa Rosa Accept Local Postulant

NCC staff and wire reports

❖

12/7 St. Ambrose of Milan, Church Father; St. Mary Joseph Rosello

❖

12/8 Feast of the Immaculate Conception

❖

12/9 St. Juan Diego

❖

12/10 Sant'Egidio—An International Community; St. Maria Goretti

❖

12/11 St. Cecilia, Patroness of Musicians; St. Michael the Archangel

❖

12/12 St. Thomas Aquinas, Doctor of the Church; St. Anne, Mother of the Virgin Mary

❖

12/13 Non-Patrons

❖

12/14 St. Richard of Chabannes, Bishop; St. Thomas More

❖

12/15 St. Lucy, Martyr; St. Lucy of Rome

❖

12/16 St. Stephen of Cloyes, Bishop; St. Martin of Tours

❖

12/17 St. Lawrence of Brive, Bishop; St. Martha of Bethany

❖

12/18 Feast of the Immaculate Conception

❖

12/19 St. Catherine of Alexandria, Martyr; St. John the Apostle and Evangelist

❖

12/20 St. Paul of the Cross, Missionary; St. Mary Magdalene

❖

12/21 Feast of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass; St. Nicholas of Myra, Bishop, Confessor

❖

12/22 Feast of St. Mary, Mother of God

❖

12/23 Feast of the Holy Family

❖

12/24 Feast of St. John the Baptist, Forerunner of the Lord

❖

12/25 Christmas Eve

❖

12/26 Feast of the Holy Family

❖

12/27 St. Ambrose of Milan, Church Father; St. Mary Joseph Rosello

❖

12/28 Feast of the Immaculate Conception

❖

12/29 Feast of St. John the Baptist, Forerunner of the Lord

❖

12/30 Feast of the Holy Family

❖

12/31 Feast of St. Joseph, Worker
Catholic Women of the Year Honored

Sonoma—On October 25, at the annual Santa Rosa Diocesan Council of Catholic Women (DCCW), Catholic women, their families, and guests gathered to give special recognition to nine of their peers as “Woman of the Year” for their outstanding leadership and service in their parishes and community. St. Francis Solano Church in Sonoma hosted this year’s event. Hosting rotates among the various women’s group throughout the diocese. Bishop Robert F. Vasa celebrated the holy sacrifice of the Mass and presented letters of congratulations to each honoree. He also imparted a special blessing to them during Mass.

The nine honorees were:

Marie Theresa Denning                St. Francis Solano Women’s Group
Juanita Ibarra                      Women of the Word
Mary H. Perez                       Madonna Sodality
Mary Rennie                         St. James Women’s Group
Becky Tedesco                      Young Ladies Institute #132
Barbara Thompson                   Young Ladies Institute #26
Jane Walters (posthumously)        St. Joseph Women’s Guild
Nora Ward                           Holy Spirit Women’s Guild
Linda Zepponi-Hervey               Young Ladies Institute #116

The DCCW is a lay women’s organization that brings together Catholic women committed to making a difference within their faith communities and beyond. The DCCW is affiliated with the National Council of Catholic Women (NCCW) which consists of more than 3,000 affiliated Catholic women’s organizations in parishes and dioceses throughout the United States and is recognized by the United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). Its mission is to support, empower, and educate all Catholic women in spirituality, leadership, and service, responding with gospel values to the needs of their faith communities and beyond.

All parish women’s organizations in the diocese are invited to join DCCW as affiliates. Women may also join as individual members.

For more information, contact Connie Lynch Sorensen at 707-823-7378.

Bishop Vasa looks on as Margaret Patrizi hands Mary Rennie her award.

Knights Host Men’s Conference

On October 18, Knights of Columbus Council 4930 hosted a daylong men’s conference at St. Eugene Cathedral. Roughly 100 men—some from the Sacramento, San Francisco, and Oakland dioceses—gathered to learn from an impressive array of speakers, including two from the diocese.

Evangelist Karlo Broussard, a Cajun musician who left his successful career to become a Catholic speaker, gave the first talk on being a man of action and not boredom.

“Jesus is calling us to service,” he said. “He is calling us to death to our self-will, to be men with an eternal perspec-

He later told the men, “If I live only for pleasure and material goods and reject God and eternal happiness, I will be plagued with emptiness, hunger, and boredom. That is not a recipe for happiness.”

After Broussard’s talk, Bishop Robert F. Vasa celebrated the holy sacrifice of the Mass. In his homily, His Excellency spoke of the need for a greater focus on men’s spirituality, and he thanked the Knights for putting the event together.

Commenting on the day’s Gospel he said, “we know our weakness is also our pride. We must tackle that pride, become more humble, become more Christ-like, become more Marian, recognizing God’s grace and power that can work wonders in us and through us, that it is God’s grace we must rely on and the power of His words, the power of His sacraments, and take advantage of those regularly and frequently in order to curb our own passion, our own pride”.

He concluded by commending them for their “refusal to settle for mediocrity in [their] spiritual live” and for “seeking the fullness of Gospel.”

Following lunch, Bill May, president of Catholics for the Common Good, served as the afternoon’s first speaker.

He spoke on the state of marriage. One thing about the current marriage debate he found most troubling—because it is a radical shift from the way things have historically been—is that the government no longer contends “there are legitimate government interests in creating a legal structure that promotes the raising of children by both their biological parents.”

He said the reason why the Church and her faithful can never accede to a redefinition of marriage is that “our mission in witnessing the gospel is to witness the truth about marriage in its fullness and beauty that reveals the truth of it to people.”

St. Eugene parishioner Dr. Paul Young, an Evangelical pastor for 35 years, has spent much of last 15 years since his conversion studying the Faith’s teachings. Thus he made his hour presentation a Q&A session by taking audience questions on Catholicism. Karlo Broussard then gave a talk titled, “Christian Manhood: No Indifference Allowed.”

Perhaps the most well received address came from the vicar at St. Eugene, Fr. Raul Lemos. In turns funny, obser-

For those who need assistance or want to volunteer during Advent and Christmastide, here are the numbers for the diocesan Catholic Charities offices:

Santa Rosa (main): 707-528-8712
Napa: 707-224-4403
Eureka: 707-441-9192
Website: www.srcharities.org

If you can, please make a generous donation. There are more needs than ever and fewer resources to meet them. In the Name of Christ Whose birth we celebrate and Whose second coming we anticipate, thank you.
History sometimes displays the happy capacity to arrange anniversaries so that one sheds light on another.

On November 21, 1964, Pope Paul VI solemnly promulgated the Second Vatican Council’s Lumen Gentium (“Dogmatic Constitution on the Church”), which began by proclaiming Christ the “light of the nations.” Twenty-five years later, on the night of November 9-10, 1989, the Berlin Wall was breached and communism in Europe collapsed, reduced to rubble like the monastery that divided Germany for decades. Fifty years after Lumen Gentium and 25 years after the Revolution of 1989, we can more clearly see how the Council contributed to the communist crack-up.

Not in the way senior Vatican diplomats imagined, however. In the post-Council euphoria, it was thought that Vatican II’s “openness” would help facilitate a “convergence” between East and West such that the Wall and the post-war division of Europe would eventually melt away. What actually happened was far more dramatic and illustrates the way in which salvation history works—inside what the world sees as “history,” can bend history in a more humane direction.

Lumen Gentium described the Church as having a sacramental character: The Church is “a sign or instrument... of communion with God and of unity among all men.” That longing for “unity among all men” is only possible through “communion with God.” It can’t be created by ultramundane, hyper-secular modernity; as the great Council theologian, Henri de Lubac, once put it, human beings without God can only organize the world against each other.

But whereas many in the West took the Council’s call for dialogue and openness as an invitation to modify the Catholic critique of communism, the Polish Church, led by two giants—Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński and the young archbishop of Kraków Karol Wojtyła—read Lumen Gentium (and indeed the entirety of Vatican II) as an invitation to press hard for religious freedom and other basic human rights, so that the Church could be the unifying, liberating force that Polish communism manifestly could not be.

Wojtyła brought that conviction to Rome with him when he was elected pope in October 1978. Then on his first pastoral pilgrimage back to his Polish homeland, John Paul II deftly wove together themes from Poland’s Christian history with Vatican II’s call for a re-energized Catholicism intent on converting the world. In nine days this inspired a revolution of conscience rooted in Christ, “the light of the nations.”

Christ, from Whom we learn the truth about the merciful Father and the truth about our humanity; Christ, Who is the true liberator because He is, as John Paul styled his first encyclical, Redemptor Hominis, the “redeemer of man.”

John Paul II’s revolution of conscience ignited tinder that had been gathering in central and eastern Europe for years, and 10 years later, in November 1989, the Wall came down, demolished by the aroused consciences of men and women who had dared to take the risk of freedom, and who had dared to live in the truth.

Communism would eventually have collapsed of its own implausibility and incompetence. But it might not have collapsed in 1989 without John Paul II’s revolution of conscience. And John Paul’s papacy was made possible, in turn, by Vatican II. Not by what Pope Benedict XVI called the “Council of the media,” which seemed to deconstruct Catholicism, but by the real Council, the Council that called the Church to proclaim Christ as “light of the nations” and to convert the world through all the instruments that form the Catholic symphony of truth.


What the world knows as “history” is really just the surface of things. Beneath that surface, salvation history—God’s liberating providence—is at work, often in hidden ways, but sometimes more clearly.

There were two such moments of clarity 50 and 25 years ago. We should recognize and celebrate them today.
The Party Don’t Start ’Til I’m Born!

by Mara Russo

Being a bit of a procrastinator, I am grateful for the fact that the Christmas season doesn’t actually begin until the evening of December 24.

Why? Well, when January 3 rolls around and you still haven’t received a Christmas card from me, no worries! I have until Epiphany, peeps! [Editor’s note: This will surprise many readers, but the season actually lasts until Candelmas, February 2, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord.] Yeah, that’s right: The 12 days of Christmas start on Christmas Day! Woohoo. Yay for me! I have an excuse for my procrastination!

Okay, but here’s my problem: Very few people are aware of this fact. So when I give someone a gift on, say, December 29, that person doesn’t realize I’m on time. That person thinks I’m late. That annoys me and makes me want to take my gift back. (Just kidding.)

I think people have forgotten that Christmas Day is the beginning, not the end of the Christmas season because we as a culture have turned into giant children. We possess our smartphones, tablets, and all sorts of technology that enable us to have instant access to music, movies, information, and people. While much good can come from it, one of the downsides is that we also have become less patient. I nearly had a stroke waiting for a video of a baby laughing at a dog to load… it took at least four seconds!

We want the payoff without the payment, the reward without the effort, the baby without labor (can I get an “Amen,” sisters?!) the joy of Christmas without the preparation of Advent. The world around us only reinforces this constant seeking the next form of excitement, the next thrill.

Got a Screaming Kid at Church? 6 Things to Remember

by Rachel Lu

With three young boys, Mass can be the scariest part of my whole week. I wonder: Will the baby scream right in the middle of Mass? Will I end up chasing the toddler down the aisle? Will I be singing “Sleigh Ride” while the baby and I end up bawling? If individuals and families begin to focus on preparing their hearts for the coming of the Savior during Advent as intended, then we will truly be able to encounter the newborn Christ and experience the real joy of Christmas.

The alternative is to allow the hollow commercialization to continue, and eventually we’ll be “rewarded” with Miley Cyrus singing “Wrecking (Jingle) Bells.” You have been warned.

4) Remember that your spiritual needs matter too. One of the toughest things about naughty kids is the way they prevent you from “recharging your battery” at church. I’ll be honest: sometimes my husband and I take a break from whole-family church and split up, with one of us taking the oldest child to church while the other goes alone to a later service. I think this is a justifiable accommodation for a life phase in which our kids make it hard for us to recover our own spiritual peace.

I also know parents who achieve the same effect by going individually to mid-week services. Once we started doing this, I suddenly found myself more patient with the young ones on the weeks when they were with us. I think perhaps I didn’t realize the extent to which I was just frustrated with them for depriving me of my worship time.

5) Your kids may be absorbing more than you realize. Having said that, it’s worth remembering that kids often take in elements of worship even when they don’t seem to be paying attention. I’m sometimes surprised by the questions they ask after Mass, demonstrating that, even when they seemed to be most intent on distracting me or their brothers, good things were penetrating their consciousness.

6) Jesus asked the little children to come to him. He’s happy that they’re here. Sometimes it’s upsetting when you hear high-handed remarks about church behavior from people who don’t seem to understand what children are like. They almost seem to suppose that if your kids misbehave, it’s because you haven’t bothered to tell them church is a place for being reverent. Reassure yourself that Jesus knows what kids are like and loves having them close by.

Dr. Rachel Lu, PhD, teaches philosophy at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. Reprinted with the kind permission of churchPOP.com.

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Advent: There’s More to It Than Four Candles

So it’s that time of year again. Out come the Christmas decorations. But why not bring out the Advent decorations? After all, there’s the Advent wreath and calendar, and then there’s the, uh, Advent wreath and calendar. And, well, of course, the, uh, Advent calendar and wreath. Lots of options. . . . Yeah. Let’s face it. We hear the words, “Observe Advent!” and our brains say, “Right. How many days until Christmas?”

But this is an important season. We are meant to observe and participate in it. But how? The wreath’s pretty much it, right?

Actually a ton of great Advent traditions exist that will not only help you to keep its four weeks well but can make your Christmas all that more special, too.

The old standbys

There’s nothing wrong with the calendar and wreath. With the wreath, some families won’t just light a different candle each week. They will also sing some carols and read Advent-related verses from the Bible or say a special prayer.

Some families eat dinner by the wreath’s glow so that each week brings more and more light.

The Jesse Tree

One relatively new custom is a lot of fun for families, especially those with little children. It is called the Jesse Tree, so named because of Isaiah 11:1’s prophecy that the Messiah would come from the “stump of Jesse.”

Take a tree branch—some use evergreen, some use interesting ones that have fallen to the ground—and each day adorn it with a different handmade ornament. The ornaments show Jesus’ ancestors and/or Old Testament prophecies about Him. You can find the ornaments online, and kids love coloring them, laminating them with clear contact paper, and cutting them out. And of course getting to place a new one on the tree each day is a treat, too.

It also gives parents an opportunity to teach their children about salvation history.

Back in my day...

Advent always has been a penitential season (hence the color purple, which is not only royal but a color of mourning). In the olden days, people focused on giving alms, and it was a completely meatless time. Roughly 40 days of no meat, cheese, butter, or eggs.

The Church relaxed this discipline several generations ago, but it still encourages us to make small sacrifices and to give alms.

One mother wrote on Facebook that “our family decides to do some extra work of charity for four weeks.” Sometimes they also give up candy. “We are all the more excited for Christmas doing some extra work of charity for four weeks. ‘Sometimes they also give up candy. ‘We are all the more excited for Christmas doing some extra work of charity for four weeks.”

December 13 is the Feast of St. Lucy. This is a great feast for young and old alike. St. Lucy was a Roman martyr and her name comes from the Latin for “light.” Before they killed her, the pagans removed her eyes, so she is the patroness of those with eye problems.

Before the Renaissance Church revised the calendar, her feast fell on the shortest day of the year. Hence it was said, “This is the feast of Lucy light, shortest day and longest night.” The evening is often marked by huge bonfires.

In Nordic countries, young maidens dress on St. Lucy’s Day in white gowns and process to the church before dawn. “This is the feast of Lucy light, shortest day and longest night.” The evening is often marked by huge bonfires.

For six nights starting December 17, vespers features a different “O” antiphon (so-called for its opening letter).

Each beseeches God to send God under various titles and begs Him to come (e.g., O Wisdom, O Lord, O Key of David, etc.).

The “O” antiphons inspired the beautiful medieval hymn, “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.” Each stanza of this famous song is a poetic rendering of an antiphon, which is why the hymn was historically sung only during the eight days prior to Christmas.

Wait! Don’t put Baby Jesus in there yet!

One parent wrote this on Facebook: “Another ‘lesson’ we teach our kiddos makes use of a long-standing Italian tradition, Il Presepio (the Christmas crib). Il Presepio recalls Jesus’ birth. But you won’t find the Infant Jesus in our Nativity scene!! After all, He isn’t actually ‘born’ yet! Our presepio includes only Mary, Joseph, and an empty crib, with the children fill with hay each day they do a good deed to make a soft bed for Jesus. This is a fabulous reminder of the reason for the season that little minds can understand!” The Christ Child goes in the crib on Christmas Day.

A day for would-be brides and mothers

Germans call the year’s longest night (December 20) die Thomasachts. December 21, the year’s shortest day is der Thomasag, since until the revision of the Roman calendar in 1969, this was the Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle (it is now on July 3). A German saying goes, “After Thomas Day, the day grows by a rooster crow.”

AboutGerman.net reports, “On Thomasachts maidens bake Klötzenkranz, a fruit bread containing dried pears (“Klötzen”), raisins, figs, plums, and nuts. On this night maidens hoping to marry also toss a shoe or slipper back over their heads. The one whose shoe falls with the tip pointing to the door will marry in the following year. Another old custom is for young [wives] to run outside and hug fruit tree trunks (for fertility).”

Advent plays

Theater productions dramatize the Holy Family’s attempt to find a place to stay. Called Weihnachtsgeschichten in Germany and Posadas in Hispanic countries, these plays take place December 16–24, nine days that symbolize Mary’s pregnancy. “At the last home all are invited in for prayer and refreshments.”

When is a penitential season not so penitential? So many amazing feasts and memorials exist in Advent. One of the first is on December 4, that of St. Barbara. All over Poland on St. Barbara’s Day, balls are organized.

In Provence, France, the Sainte Barbe (Saint Barbara) celebrations feature a timeless Advent custom. Says holytrinitygermany.org, a Barbara branch, that is, a twig “is broken from a fruit tree (especially cherry), placed in a bowl of water, and kept in a warm, well-lit part of the house, such as the kitchen [where they will bloom]. Barbara branches are reminiscent of the image from Isaiah of Christ as a Flower from the root of Jesse (cf. Is 11:1). They can thus be instructive in teaching children the meaning of Advent and Christmas.”

Then comes the beloved St. Nicholas’ Day, which in much of Europe is the main gift giving day. In France they celebrate with big shows, street parades and fireworks.

Even in our country, many families hang stocking or lay out shoes on the night of December 5 so St. Nicholas can fill them with treats such as gold foil-covered chocolate coins, oranges, and small gifts.

At children’s parties in Poland, Nicholas distributes the gifts. But before he gives any presents away, he “asks a child to say a prayer, to make a Sign of the Cross, or to recite a part of the catechism.”

It’s not just the children who get in on the action. In Sweden, adults enjoy mulled wine (aka, Bishop’s wine).

Another tradition for December 5, the vigil of St. Nicholas’ memorial, is for children to write notes to the Baby Jesus. Afterwards they place them on the windowsill, and legend says Nicholas takes them to Our Lord in heaven.

So many amazing feasts and memorials exist in Advent. But this is an important season. We are meant to observe and participate in it. But how? The wreath’s pretty much it, right?

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As we celebrate the nativity of our Lord and Savior, Catholic Cemeteries’ staff wish you a blessed Christmas season, and invite you to join us in creating and sharing your own Legacy of Faith. Even in the feelings of loss that accompany the death of a loved one, faith in Christ and His resurrection brings us to our belief that life has changed, not ended.

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Catholic Cemeteries . . . A Legacy of Faith

Afterward, the hosts cover the table with a white tablecloth and set one additional place for an unexpected guest who, especially that night, should not be turned away. This reminds us that St. Joseph and Mary also looked for shelter.

“Until the first star appears, Wigilia is a day of fasting…. It should be pointed out that today in Poland, no one imagines the Wigilia dinner without fish (carp in particular), just as nobody in the US thinks of Thanksgiving dinner without turkey.”

When to decorate that tree?
Before the twentieth century, the Christmas tree was usually decorated on the Christmas Eve. After all the decorations are for Christmas, not Advent. They are festive, as is Christmas, but Advent is a penitential season.

And just as they did not go up until Christmas Eve, they did not go down until the Vigil of the Epiphany (January 5).

It is possible to buy the tree before December 24 and simply leave it undecorated. Thus it becomes the Yule tree, a reminder of life amidst winter’s grey, and only becomes a Christmas tree after decoration.
Christmas Happens in Many Ways

Other than Christmas Mass, most of our American Christmas traditions—from how we celebrate the Feast to the songs we sing—were largely dictated by our English immigrant ancestors. Despite 200 years of Polish, Irish, Italian, and other Catholic immigrants flooding our shores, Christmas tide is still basically an Anglo-Saxon Protestant affair. And yet there are so many rich Catholic traditions that not only make the reason for the season more evident but can help partakers’ faith come alive.

Furthermore many of our English ancestors’ customs have their roots in their own Catholic heritage. Take, for instance, the holly wreath. With its deep green leaves and blazing red berries, it represents Moses and the burning bush, as well as symbolizing God’s love for the Blessed Virgin. The leaves’ sharp tip and the berries’ blood red recall that Christ’s head bled by the crown of thorns. In Poland, Christmas Day—which the Poles call the first holiday—is spent with family at home. Furthermore, like Sunday is observed by the Jews, it is a day of complete, rejuvenating rest. No visiting, cleaning, or cooking are allowed on that day. Only leftovers from the previous night’s feast are served. As one blog put it, “This is a day of enjoyment, for Jesus was born.”

In Mexico, Christmas Eve—December 24—is the second holiday. This is the day when people visit others and exchange Christmas greetings. As night encroaches upon day, the crunch of footsteps in the snow and Christmas carolers singing are heard around the town.

Especially popular is Herody, a form of caroling that is also a live performance usually played by 12 young boys. According to polskypresents.com, “Dressed in special costumes, they include King Herod, a field marshal, a knight, a soldier, an angel, a devil, death, a Jew, Mary, shepherds, and sometimes the Three Kings and an accoutrement. They sing pastoral songs and carols, and when let into a house, perform scenes from King Herod’s life. Oration and songs vary and depend upon to whom they are being addressed: the owner of the house, a young woman about to be married, a widow, etc. At the conclusion, the performers are offered refreshments and some money. Also popular is caroling with a cráb (zopila) and with a star. Usually, those around the porch are met with free caroling teenagers. They, too, are given some money.”

One foreign tradition that has become widely accepted here in the United States is the poinsettia. One website tells us that the beautiful seasonal flower “was brought to America by a Mexican ambassador around 1851. Mexically, it was considered a symbol of honor, or ‘agrément.’ According to Mexicans,” the crèche and so on. But it seems like every town, whether humble or huge, has markets selling Christmas trees, the crèche and so on. In Spain, too, it is very common to have Christmas trees, with fruits, nuts, marzipan, homemade gifts, candles, and decorations.

Worldholidaytraditions.com tells us, “As the Christmas Eve events are held in the Spanish provinces, tiny oil lamps are lighted, warming village windows.” The crowds at the Christmas market thin as shoppers return to prepare for the coming meal. The Christmas Eve gaiety is interrupted at midnight by the ringing of bells calling the families to La Misa del Gallo (The Mass of the Rooster, i.e., Midnight Mass).

Whereas the Poles eat their big Christmas meal on Wigilia, the Spaniards never eat theirs until after midnight. This large family dinner features Pavo Trufado de Navidad (Christmas turkey with truffles). For dessert, families might serve the traditional Christmas treat turron, basically an almond candy. Afterward, the family members sing carols and hymns.

“The rejoicing continues through the wee hours of the morning. An old Spanish verse says, ‘Esta noche es Noche-Buena, y no es noche de dormir’ (This is the good night, therefore it is not meant for sleep).” There is fellowship and joy in the streets and ‘a special Christmas dance called the Jota and the words and music have been handed down for hundreds of years. They dance to the sound of guitars and castanets....’

“Christmas Day is spent at church, at feasts, and in more merry-making. A custom peculiar to Spain is that of ‘swinging.’ Swings are set up throughout the courtyards and young people swing to the accompaniment of songs and laughter.”

On December 28, the Feast of the Holy Innocents, young boys light bonfires and one of them acts as the town’s or village’s mayor. He orders “townspeople to perform civic chores such as sweeping the streets. Refusal to comply results in fines which are used to pay for the celebration.” A great hymn for this feast is “Coventry Carol.”

It is Santa not who gives out gifts in Spain, but the Three Magi. Furthermore they put something in children’s shoes each night between Christmas and Epiphany Eve. Epiphany, January 6, “is heralded with parades in various cities where candy and cakes are distributed to throngs of children.” Portugal observes many of the same traditions. For their after Midnight Mass meal, they serve codfish, boiled potatoes, and cabbage. Afterwards, a variety of traditional fried desserts are served, including fillouxles made of fried pumpkin-dough, rubanadas (thick French toast), little round pastries called azevias (invented by nuns at a Portuguese convent), and the fruit cake-like Bolo Rei (King Cake).

In Ireland, families place candles in their window’s windows, which is meant to show Our Lady and St. Joseph that here is room for them there. Some families also tell the children that the candles help “hasten Santa find his way to their home.”

The Irish also do not confine their ornaments to the tree. If there is an open space for the snowflakes, elves, angels, and Santas, they will place them there.

For Germans, after mother decorates the tree “with apples, candy, nuts, cookies, cars, trains, angels, tinsel, family treasures, and candles or lights,” she lays out “brilliantly decorated plates for each family member, loaded with fruits, nuts, marzipan, chocolate, and biscuits. When all is ready a bell is rung as a signal for the children to enter this Christmas fantasy room. Carols are sung, sometimes the children that the candles help “hasten Santa find his way to their home.”

The Germans have a folk saying: “If Christmas is bright and clear, one hopes for an abundant year. If the crow is standing at Christmas in clover, she’ll be sitting in snow at Easter.”

With the French, the crèche plays a huge part. “In Provence, the children bring rocks, branches and moss to make a setting for the manger. Little terra-cotta figures called santons (little saints) get grouped around the manger to represent the Holy Family, the other characters of the story of the Nativity, and the people of the village: the mayor, the priest, the policeman, the butcher, the baker, the miller, the farmer. In the stable is a reproduction of the manger of Bethlehem, with the ox and the donkey placed close to Jesus and Mary and Joseph in the foreground welcoming the visitors.”

As in many places in Europe, the big meal (le réveillon) is had after returning from Midnight Mass. “In Alsace, for example, the traditional goose is brought in on a platter and given the place of honor on the table. Breton serve buckwheat cakes with sour cream. Turkey and chestnuts are served in Burgundy. The favorite dishes of Paris and the Ile-de-France region are oysters, foie gras, and the traditional cake in the form of a Yule log or bûche de Noël which used to burn on the hearth on Christmas Eve. The wines served are generally Muscadet, Anjou, Sauterne, and Champagne.”

The Alsace region “has possibly the greatest community spirit. In some towns, shepherds offer a lamb on Christmass Eve, while in others the réveillon is held in the snowy mountains or a song festival precedes the Midnight Mass. In the small village of Sollierville, the whole population gathers bringing bread, meat, and candies as a symbol of the apostles. Then a supper is offered to the important townpeople and their guests. During Mass, the characters of the manger are portrayed by people from the village.”

The magic of Christmas is the magic of the Orient. During the Middle Ages, minstrels wandered through villages and towns, telling les marvelous qui adviennent en la Sainte Nuit (the marvels that happened on the Holy Night), the legend of the flight into Egypt, or the legend of the sower who, when asked which way the Holy Family had gone, deceived King Herod.

“One story is that of the dancers condemned to dance incessantly for a year because their movements had turned the priest’s thoughts during Midnight Mass. Another such tale is the charming story of the little homeless matchgirl who, sitting in the snow on the sidewalk, struck all her matches in order to imagine what Christmas would be like in a house.”

“But Christmas is a time of miracles, and at the striking of the last match, shining golden angels conveyed the little girl to Paradise.”

Portuguese Azevias

Sweet potato or sweet chickpea filling:

Peel two medium size sweet potatoes and cut in pieces or 7 oz. (200g) of chickpeas. Boil with only enough water to cover. Reduce to purée. Add six tablespoons of sugar (brown if you like), lemon zest from half a lemon, and two teaspoons of cinnamon. Mix well and cook over low heat for five minutes. Let cool before using.

For added flavor, take 5 oz. (150g) of almonds, place on baking tray, bake until brown, then grind them.

Dough:

2 cups of self rising flour
2 tbsp. of butter
1 tbsp. of olive oil
Juice of one orange
3 tbsp. of Brandy
3 tbsp. of water

Add ingredients in the exact order given above. It works best to slightly melt the butter. Mix well until it makes a consistent dough. Let rest for 30-60 minutes.

Remove the dough from the refrigerator and turn out onto a lightly-floured work surface. Flour a rolling pin and use to roll out the dough very thinly. Use the rim of a glass or a pastry cutter to excise round from the pastry (re-roll the remaining scraps and cut more rounds from them). Place a teaspoon (or a tablespoon) of the filling on one half of the pastry then fold over and seal to form half-moons. Press the edges with the tines of a fork then either deep fry or bake the pockets until golden brown and cooked through.

Dust with sugar and serve.
El emotivo beso del Papa Francisco a un anciano sacerdote

ROMA (ACI/EWTN Noticias) —La historia de Don Fortunato Cicerielli comovió al Papa Francisco. Este sacerdote italiano quiso celebrar el 60 aniversario de su ordenación sacerdotal participando en la audiencia general del Pontífice, quien tuvo un hermoso gesto de afecto y agradecimiento.

Don Fortunato

Don Fortunato llegó a la Plaza de San Pedro como un peregrino más. Habían pasado seis décadas desde que el 3 de octubre de 1954 fue ordenado sacerdote, de modo que unos amigos le regalaron para celebrarlo una invitación a la catequesis del Papa Francisco en la Plaza de San Pedro. A sus 89 años de edad, Don Fortunato pasó uno de los días más felices de su vida. “¡El Papa me ha besado las manos! Ha sido una emoción enorme, fue conmovedor. ¡Imagínese, un Papa que te besa las manos!”, explicó Don Fortunato en declaraciones a ACI Prensa.

Después de la sorpresa, el sacerdote aseguró que la emoción le impidió articular palabra. “El Papa me habló, pero yo estaba tan emocionado que no entendía nada”, recuerda. Don Fortunato pertenece a la “Obra Nacional del Medio Día de Italia”, una red de orfanatos y otras estructuras de asistencia que acogen a los niños sin recursos económicos, fundada por los sacerdotes Giovanni Semeria y Giovanni Minozzi en 1919. Este anciano sacerdote ha dedicado toda su vida a la asistencia de niños abandonados. “Antes cuidábamos de los huérfanos de guerra, después a los hijos de trabajadores más humildes, y ahora suelen llegar niños que tienen padres, pero que por problemas de drogadicción o por otro motivo los abandonan”, lamenta.

“Se llevan a las jóvenes, y hacen lo que quieren”: grave crisis en Guerrero, México

SIAMÉ, los vecinos del poblado de “Tierra caliente”, como la categoría de Ciudad Altamirano, México, se sienten agobiados por los conflictos y lleguen a la paz, sino que va a generar más violencia, más conflictos y lleguen a la paz, busca “la lucha por la paz social”.

Las Bienaventuranzas están entre los pasos favoritos de la Biblia. Pero, ¿Qué es una bienaventuranza? En la Biblia “bienaventurado” es alguien que ha recibido dones de gran valor, regalos que llevan a una realización completa y a la felicidad de la vida eterna. Si yo le preguntara cuál es la primera bienaventuranza, probablemente respondería “Bienaventurados los pobres de espíritu”.

depor el Dr. Marcellino D’Ambrosio

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“Debemos acercarnos a “la lucha por la paz social” y a los vecinos del poblado de “Tierra caliente”, en la región de Ciudad Altamirano, México, que se sienten agobiados por los conflictos y lleguen a la paz, buscando “la lucha por la paz social”.

El responsable de comunicación informó que el obispo ya ha designado un nuevo sacerdote para la Parroquia San Miguel Arcángel, del pueblo de San Miguel Totolapan, en sustitución del P. J. Ascensión Acuña Osorio, asesinado el pasado 22 de septiembre.

Las familias están esperando a su nuevo sacerdote, ellas están muy heridas, necesitan mucho de su ayuda, no tienen la culpa de la muerte del P. Ascencio, sino los grupos criminales que le habían pedido 300 mil pesos y como sólo pudo juntar 50 mil, fue motivo suficiente para asesinarle”, explicó el responsable de comunicación informó que el obispo ya ha designado un nuevo sacerdote para la Parroquia San Miguel Arcángel, del pueblo de San Miguel Totolapan, en sustitución del P. J. Ascensión Acuña Osorio, asesinado el pasado 22 de septiembre.

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News Briefs

**DIOCESAN**

**Gifts of clothing, more in style at Healdsburg's St. John**

On November 11, St. John the Baptist School in Healdsburg held its annual Veterans Day Dinner. The event featured patriotic music and performances by students, with the color guard provided by Cub Scout Pack 21. Also featured was a slide photo tribute to all of the parish’s veterans, both living and deceased. Sources say it was a lovely evening.

St. John the Baptist Church will put the notion of “It's better to give than receive” to work this Advent season through its outreach to Healdsburg’s less fortunate. As in past years, the parish will augment its Friday lunch offering to the homeless and others in need with a Christmas gift of new clothing basics, toiletries, gift cards, camping supplies, and access to donated clothing. This will occur on Friday, December 19, starting at 10am.

On Monday, December 22, at 10am, the church will have its Christmas celebration for struggling families. In addition to the gifts for adults and children, participants will have an opportunity to select donated clothing, a fruit basket, and personal care items.

St. John School children will play a key part in providing gifts for all of the families by working with the St. Vincent de Paul Society to spend parishioners’ donations toward the purchase of the gifts for the homeless and those in need. The parish also helped raise gifts and donations through its Giving Tree, which was in the church on the First Sunday of Advent and was organized by the Ladies Guild. The confirmation class assisted in the organizing, packing, and distributing the gifts.

**Healdsburg ICF dinner raises $18,000**

Readers may recall how for months in the calendar section, mention was made of the October golf outing and a fundraising dinner later that evening hosted by Italian Catholic Federation #52 in Healdsburg.

According to ICF correspondent Nancy Seppi, the event was a phenomenal success. The golfing event drew 72 duffers, while the dinner saw over 110 guests. All told, the day grossed $18,000. The money will support an endowment fund at St. John the Baptist School, assist the parish’s St. Vincent de Paul Society chapter, as well as help ICF’s national charity, which is thalassemia. Also known as Cooley’s Anemia, the disease is a blood disorder that results in improper oxygen transport and the destruction of red blood cells. The largest research center for a cure is in Oakland at Children’s Hospital.

**SVDP School gives and receives**

For over 25 years, St. Vincent de Paul Elementary School has participated in a program called PEAK Pals. PEAK stands for “People Engaged in Acts of Kindness.” At the beginning of the school year, every grade gets paired up with another, and this is their PEAK Pal for the school year. Classes meet monthly to share in an activity designated by the teachers.

Recently, first and eighth grade PEAK Pals made thank you cards to send to local veterans. The cards were to express gratitude for the veterans’ service and dedication to our country.

This tradition remains a beautiful way of bringing joy to the sadness of loss. It also reminds the faithful pray for their loved ones, while the rest of the children made class altars.

**El Dia de los Muertos**

During the first week of November, St. Mary of the Angels School in Ukiah celebrated El Dia de Los Muertos (Day of the Dead) in grades K-6. The children remembered their loved ones by making decorative papel picado (cut out paper designs), calaveras de azúcar (sugar skulls), máscaras (masks), and esqueletos (skeletons). The fourth grade children all made individual altars (memorials), including creative paper calacas (skeleton figures) and diamante poetry (poems written in a diamond shape) about their loved ones, while the rest of the children made class altars.

**Earthquake Recovery**

St. John the Baptist School in Napa reports a bid was accepted and a contract signed to repair the school from the damage caused in the August earthquake. Repairs began on the school’s west wing on November 19. Several exterior columns were stripped to expose concrete and rebar and to assess structural integrity. Officials and the contractors are stressing the need to ensure the buildings are ready if and when another earthquake happens.

Please donate to this worthy effort.

To learn more about this program or other community building activities at St. Vincent, please visit their website (www.svleom.org) or phone the office for one of their monthly tours (707-762-6426).

In other SVDP news, the primary school received a Major Impact Grant worth $14,900 from the Petaluma Educational Foundation on November 6. The grant was titled “Model Classrooms in the 21st Century” and the school will use the funds to purchase non-glare whiteboards, ceiling mounted LCD projectors, iPads, and Apple TV for the technology lab and five classrooms encompassing grades five through eight.

**Cardinal Newman career day a success**

Cardinal Newman High School held its career day on October 15. The event gave students an opportunity to learn about different jobs and what it takes to be successful in college and beyond.

Thirty-seven people, consisting of Cardinal Newman and Ursuline High School alumni and the larger community, gave presentations to the students and discussed what inspired them to pursue their chosen careers. They also reviewed the educational requirements necessary, the rewards, and what real world problems they encountered.

Along with bringing real world experiences to the table, the alumni talked about the value of their education at Cardinal Newman and Ursuline.

Keynote speaker Tim Bucher (’82), a silicon Valley entrepreneur and winery owner, spoke about how important it is for people to enjoy what they do and how life’s path may change. He also discussed the importance of high school. It is, he said, the starting block to everything else that will come later in life. Bucher challenged the students to use a new app called Lyve (www.mylyve.com) and he developed to let him know if they find any “bugs.” For every legitimate “bug” found, Tim will donate $100 (up to $5,000) to Cardinal Newman. Whoever has the most input has a chance at an internship at his company Lyve Minds.

**It’s never too soon**

The Justin-Siena High School online admission application for the 2015–16 school year is now available on its website. For more information, log onto justin-siena.org.

**NATIONAL**

**Did abortion stance cause Democrats to lose Senate?**

Washington, DC (CNA/EWTN News)—In the wake of momentous losses for Democrats in November’s elections, one Democrat group said the party’s abortion stance may have isolated voters and hindered candidates on both sides of the issue.

“It was a rough election cycle for pro-life Democrats, largely due to our own party’s position on abortion,” Demo- crats for Life executive director Kristen Day told CNA.

Noting that 21 million Democrats identify as pro-life, Day said the party’s inflexible stance on the issue is too extreme for most party members.

“A large majority of Democrats support reasonable restrictions on abortion. We are alienating a whole new generation of pro-life Democrats.”

Day said the Democratic Party’s rigid emphasis on abortion hurt the party overall, both those who adhere to the party’s platform and those who object to it.

In some cases, a singular focus on abortion came across as desperate to voters, she said, pointing to incumbent Democratic United States Senator Mark Udall’s loss in Colorado after attacking his opponent’s pro-life stance so heavily, he earned the local nickname “Mark Urucer.”

“He made his whole campaign about abortion,” Day said of Udall.

Democratic Texas gubernatorial candidate Wendy Davis also made abortion a focal point of her run for office. She lost the election, failing to gain even the state’s women’s vote. Similarly abortion activist Sandra Fluke, who gained public attention by advocating for employer-funded contraception, lost her bid for California’s State Senate by a 20-point margin.

Day pointed to Maine, where Democratic congressional candidate Emily Cain “made abortion the foundation of her campaign” and “lost in a Democratic-leaning district that was in Democratic hands since 1995.”

However Day suggested the Democrat Party’s “out of touch” platform on abortion harmed not only those candi- dates who agree with it, but interfered the efforts of pro-life Democrats as well.

In West Virginia, Democratic Governor Earl Ray Tomblin—who has previously described himself as pro-life—vetted a Democrat-led effort to pass a late-term abortion ban.

Day thought this helped torpedo the reelection chances of Congressman Nick Rahall, whom she had endorsed.

She said Rahall lost in a “guilt by association” race, in which Republicans were able to make the argument that “you cannot trust pro-life Democrats in West Virginia.”

However Day suggested the Democrat Party’s “out of touch” position on abortion harmed not only those candi- dates who agree with it. It hampered the efforts of pro-life Democrats as well.

Day said the party “thought the momentous losses for Democrats in November’s elections, one Democrat group said the party’s abortion stance may have isolated voters and hindered candidates on both sides of the issue. "It was a rough election cycle for pro-life Democrats, largely due to our own party’s position on abortion," Demo- crats for Life executive director Kristen Day told CNA. Noting that 21 million Democrats identify as pro-life, Day said the party’s inflexible stance on the issue is too extreme for most party members. "A large majority of Democrats support reasonable restrictions on abortion. We are alienating a whole new generation of pro-life Democrats."

Day said the Democratic Party’s rigid emphasis on abortion hurt the party overall, both those who adhere to the party’s platform and those who object to it. In some cases, a singular focus on abortion came across as desperate to voters, she said, pointing to incumbent Democratic United States Senator Mark Udall’s loss in Colorado after attacking his opponent’s pro-life stance so heavily, he earned the local nickname “Mark Urucer.” “He made his whole campaign about abortion,” Day said of Udall. Democratic Texas gubernatorial candidate Wendy Davis also made abortion a focal point of her run for office. She lost the election, failing to gain even the state’s women’s vote. Similarly abortion activist Sandra Fluke, who gained public attention by advocating for employer-funded contraception, lost her bid for California’s State Senate by a 20-point margin. Day pointed to Maine, where Democratic congressional candidate Emily Cain “made abortion the foundation of her campaign” and “lost in a Democratic-leaning district that was in Democratic hands since 1995.” However Day suggested the Democrat Party’s “out of touch” platform on abortion harmed not only those candi- dates who agree with it, but interfered the efforts of pro-life Democrats as well."In West Virginia, Democratic Governor Earl Ray Tomblin—who has previously described himself as pro-life—vetted a Democrat-led effort to pass a late-term abortion ban.

Day thought this helped torpedo the reelection chances of Congressman Nick Rahall, whom she had endorsed. She said Rahall lost in a “guilt by association” race, in which Republicans were able to make the argument that “you cannot trust pro-life Democrats in West Virginia.” “That just provided everything the Republicans needed to attack pro-life Democrats and say this was their plan all along, that they never wanted a [post-20-week ban],” Day explained. Democrats must become a big tent party on life issues to have any hope of retaking the House and Senate, Day insisted. Two Democratic incumbents with strong pro-life records did succeed in the election. Rep. Dan Lipinski of Illinois and Rep. Collin Peterson of Minnesota were easily re-
Bishops: Proposed mandate changes insufficient
Washington, DC (CNA/EWTN News)—Despite another wave of federal administrative changes, a HHS mandate, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) says the regulation still fails to respect religious freedom.

“(The mandate) continues to substantially burden the religious liberty of stakeholders who have religious objections to the mandated coverage,” said Anthony Picarello and Michael Moses, general counsel and associate general counsel for the USCCB.

“Because it does not further a compelling government interest by the means least restrictive of religious exercise, the mandate continues to violate the Religious Freedom Restoration Act,” they stated in comments to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

The comments were issued in response to an invitation for public input by the administration, after HHS changed the terms of its controversial contraceptive mandate follow the United States Supreme Court’s decision on the Hobby Lobby case.

Court ruling affirms link between marriage, kids
Cincinnati (CNA/EWTN)—Defense of marriage advocates lauded a major 2-1 decision by a federal appeals court that noted the importance of children and sexual complementarity in upholding state laws defining marriage.

“We are particularly heartened by the Court’s acknowledgment of the reasonable arguments for preserving the true definition of marriage and by the Court’s respect for the self-determination of states on this issue,” said Archbishop Joseph C. Rodil of San Francisco, chair of the United States Bishops’ Subcommittee for the Promotion and Defense of Marriage.

On November 6, the Sixth Circuit Federal Court of Appeals upheld state laws in Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee that defined marriage as the unique relation between a man and a woman.

The circuit court judges ruled they did not have the constitutional authority to overturn a legal definition of marriage as determined by the citizens of a state.

The majority opinion, authored by Circuit Judge Jeffrey Sutton, and joined by Judge Deborah Cook, ruled the state has the valid authority to regulate or define marriage.

“All of the ways to resolve this question, one option is not available. A poll of the three judges on this panel, or for that matter all federal judges, about whether gay marriage is a good idea,” they stated. Such a determination would make a “vital policy call for the 32 million citizens” of the circuit.

“Better in this instance, we think, to allow change through the customary political processes in which the people, gay and straight alike, become the heroes of their own stories by meeting each other not as adversaries in a court system but as fellow citizens seeking to resolve a new social issue in a fair-minded way,” the opinion concluded.

One passage of the decision drew particular praise from Archbishop Cordileone.

That passage stated, “It is not society’s laws or for that matter any one religion’s laws, but nature’s laws (that men and women complement each other biologically), that created the policy imperative.”

In addition the ruling noted the role of government in encouraging people “to create and maintain stable relationships within which children may flourish.”

“By creating a status (marriage) and by subsidizing it (e.g., with tax-filing privileges and deductions), the States created an incentive for two people who procreate together to stay together for purposes of rearing offspring. That does not convict the States of irrationality, only of awareness of the biological reality that couples of the same sex do not have children in the same way as couples of opposite sexes and that couples of the same sex do not run the risk of unintended offspring. That explanation, still relevant today, suffices to allow the States to retain authority over an issue they have regulated from the beginning.”

Not everyone has the fundamental right to marry, they stated.

“The right to marry in general, and the right to gay marriage in particular, nowhere appear in the Constitution. That route for recognizing a fundamental right to same-sex marriage does not exist.”

Ministers pressured to perform same-sex weddings
Boise (CNA/EWTN News)—Two Protestant ministers in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, could face punishment or be forced to sell their nearly 100-year-old wedding chapel for declining to perform same-sex “wedding” ceremonies.

“Many have denied that pastors would ever be forced to perform ceremonies that are completely at odds with their faith, but that’s what is happening here, and it’s happened this quickly,” Jeremy Tedesco, senior legal counsel with the legal group Alliance Defending Freedom, said October 18.

“The government should tell the ministers to act contrary to their faith under threat of jail time and criminal fines,” he said. “The city cannot erase these fundamental freedoms and replace them with government coercion and intolerance.”

Tedesco responded to the changing legal climate in Idaho, which is threatening the work of David and Evelyn Knapp, ordained ministers of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel.

Married for 47 years, the couple has operated the Hitching Post Wedding Chapel since 1989. The 95-year-old chapel sits across the street from the Kootenai County Clerk’s office.

Coeur d’Aleen’s city officials have told the Knapps their refusal to perform a same-sex ceremony at their chapel violates the city’s anti-discrimination policy. For every day they refuse to perform ceremonies, they face up to 180 days in jail and up to $1,000 in fines.

The Alliance Defending Freedom has filed a federal lawsuit on behalf of the Knapps seeking a temporary restraining order against the city law.

The Knapps say if the law forces them to perform the same-sex ceremonies, they will look into selling the chapel.

Warren Wilson, an official with the city attorney’s office, told the Spokane Spokesman-Review in May the Hitching Post would “probably be considered a place of accommodation” and thus subject to the city’s anti-discrimination ordinance.

Jonathan Scruggs, legal counsel with the Alliance Defending Freedom, said, “The city somehow expects ordained pastors to flip a switch and turn off all faithfulness to their God and their vows.”

INTERNATIONAL

Exorcisms increase, sparks “pastoral emergency”
Rome (CNA/EWTN News)—Catholic experts say occult activity and the resulting need for exorcisms has reached a critical level.

Just prior to Halloween, the International Association of Exorcists (IAE) met for their twelfth annual conference in Rome.

According to AIE spokesman Dr. Valter Cascioli, an increasing number of bishops and cardinals asked to participate in the conference due to an increase in demonic activity.

“What’s incredible is the number of disturbances of extraordinary demonic activity is on the rise.”

It has become so bad in Bologna that the city’s cardinal archbishop disallowed Communion in the hand at three major archdiocesan churches because so many hosts were being stolen and used for satanic rituals.

The rise in demonic activity can be attributed to a decreasing faith among individuals, particularly among the young, coupled with an increase in curiosity and participation in occult activity such as Ouija boards and séances, Cascioli added.

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“Tremendous pressure for that, “ said Day.

“Some people are pro-choice if you want to move up in the party. Right to Life endorsement is not as significant as it used to be,” said Day.

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Critics point out that while most of the German bishops have led the charge to allow those who are divorced and civilly remarried to receive Communion, they have simultaneously denied the sacraments, including even confession, to those who opt out of paying Germany’s “church tax” (kirchensteuer). Critics say this is hypocritical. Church law and teaching enjoin against withholding the sacraments from those who can licitly and validly receive them. Thus the German definition of mercy, critics say, is a pay to pray system that has its “financial” limits.

The kirchensteuer earned the Church in Germany an income of $7 billion in 2012 and 2013. “In Germany the kirchensteuer is obligatory, such that to be able to not pay it, one must declare their departure from the church to which they belong, whether Catholic or Protestant, by a public act made before a competent civil authority,” Vatican correspondent Sandro Magister explained.

When Germans register as Catholic, Protestant, or Jew on their tax forms, the government automatically collects an income tax from them which amounts to 8 or 9 percent of their total income tax, or 3-4 percent of their salary. The kirchensteuer is given to the religious communities rather than those communities collecting a tithe. The Church uses its revenues to help run its parishes, schools, hospitals, and welfare projects.

Many Germans have de-registered in recent years to avoid paying the additional tax. Magister noted the number of persons declaring their departure from the Church has been substantial. In 2010, the figure was more than 180,000.

The number of de-registrations has been heightened this year, as the kirchensteuer is now being withheld from capital gains, as well as from salary. Many of those who have de-registered from the Church on the German government’s forms continue to practice the Faith and have de-registered to avoid the tax altogether or to support the Church with private tithe. In response to the numbers de-registering, the German bishops issued a decree in September 2012 calling such departure “a serious lapse” and listing a number of ways that such persons can continue to participate in the life of the Church. The decree specified that those who do not pay the kirchensteuer cannot receive the sacraments of confession, Communion, confirmation, or anointing of the sick, except when in danger of death; cannot hold ecclesiastical office or perform functions within the Church; cannot be a member of the Church’s associations; and cannot belong to the Church’s public associations. If those who de-registered show no sign of repentance before their death, they can even be refused a religious burial.

While these penalties have been described as “de facto excommunication,” the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts wrote in a March 13, 2006, document that opting out of taxes in a civil situation was not the same as renouncing the Faith, and thus excommunication did not apply to such persons.

The German group Union of Associations Loyal to the Pope has said it is ironic that one could reject Church teaching on any number of issues, including the indis solubility of marriage, and still be considered Catholic so long as one paid the kirchensteuer.

The group charged the “selling of sacraments” through the tax system was even worse than the abuses protested by Groups like the Action of Human Rights in Odisha.

Indian Christians under “serious threat”

Bhubaneswar, India ( Aid to the Church in Need)—With the election of Narendra Modi of the Hindu fundamentalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as India’s prime minister, the country’s secular constitution has come under threat, a Catholic priest in India has charged.

Fr. Ajay Kumar Singh, a human rights activist in Kan dharpur District, said the finish state religion of Odisha (formerly Orissa), warned of the growing influence of radical Hindu forces on the Indian subcontinent.

“Especially under threat is the Christian minority because it is rejected by extremists as alien and because the Christian message is threat to the caste system,” the priest said in an interview with international Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need. According to Fr. Kumar Singh—who is associated with the Odisha Forum for Social Action—the BJP aims to establish a state religion which excludes the lower castes and all minorities.

“They even want to impose only one language, Sanskrit, even though hundreds of languages are spoken in India,” he continued, adding that the party and the movement it represents have become the strongest political force in India, taking many observers, including Church leaders and their flock, by surprise.

“It is important for us to understand what is happening. As a Church we must think way beyond the bounds of the individual dioceses. We must act regionally and nationally in order to find responses to this challenge,” the priest said. In 2008, BJP sympathizers systematically attacked Chris tians in Odisha. The violence left more than 100 dead, according to the National People’s Tribunal (NPT), an association of human rights activists in India.

The NPT claims the attacks had been prepared well in advance. More than 600 villages were looted, with 5,600 houses, 295 churches, and 13 schools destroyed. More than 54,000 people became homeless, and of this number 30,000 never returned to their villages. Some 2,000 Christians were compelled to deny their faith. Numerous women were raped. Many of the perpetrators of the violence—though known to authorities—have never been charged.

Christian couple possibly burned alive

Lahore, Pakistan (CNA/EWTN News)—The reported killing of a Christian couple in Pakistan by a mob last month has sparked calls for the nation’s government to protect its people, especially its minorities, from violence.

“The burning alive of a Christian couple is a test case for our government. Our government must provide protection to all citizens and especially to the poor and downtrodden Christians,” Fr. James Channan, OP, director of the Peace Center Lahore, told CNA November 4 in an email interview. That intestine, Christians Shahzad Masih and his wife Shama Bibi were allegedly killed and their bodies burned by a mob after being accused of desecrating the Qur’an. The couple lived in Kot Radha Kishan, a city located nearly 40 miles southwest of Lahore. Shama was pregnant, and the couple—reported to be in their 20s or 30s—had three additional children.

The Masih’s bodies were allegedly burned in a brick kiln where they had worked, but there are varying reports of the details of the case.

Legal Evangelical Association Development, a Pakistani minority rights group, was told by Muhammad Rafique, one of the Masih’s coworkers, that following the recent death of Shahzad’s father, Shama collected some of his things, burning them, and throwing the ashes in the garbage. According to Rafique, their employer noticed this, and charged that some of the burnt pages were from the Quran; he then detained them. They owed him money, and he refused to release them without being paid.

It was then announced from local mosques that the couple had desecrated the Quran, and a mob forced their way into the room where the Masihis were kept, beat them, and then burnt them alive in the kiln’s furnace.

Pakistan Today was told by one of the Masih’s relatives that “a Muslim mob of about 3,000-4,000 people attacked the couple’s quarters at the brick kiln and tortured the couple to death. They later threw their bodies into the kiln and completely burnt them.” The BBC was told by a security official that police had tried to save the Masihis, “but they were outnumbered and attacked by the angry crowd.” Local policeman Jawad Qamar told Pakistan Today that 48 had been arrested in connection with the murders and further efforts are being made.

Pakistan Today also wrote that “Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif has constituted a three-member committee to fast track the investigation of the killings and ordered police to be present at Christian neighborhoods in the province.” Fr. Channan lamented that the couple was burned to death “on mere accusation of burning some pages which contained some verses from the Holy Quran. I am 100 percent sure that it was not a deliberate act, if any from Shama. They would not have dared to do so knowing the consequences. It is a false accusation. To people burn alive on mere accusation by a mob of fanatic Pakistani Muslims is a barbaric act in the modern age. I condemn it in the strongest words possible.”

Pakistan’s state religion is Islam, and around 97 percent of the population is Muslim. The nation has blasphemy laws that impose strict punishment on those who desecrate the Qur’an or who defame or insult Muhammad.

The blasphemy laws are said to often be used to settle scores or to persecute minorities.

While non-Muslims constitute only 3 percent of the Pakistan population, 14 percent of blasphemy cases have been levied against them.

Pakistani Christians enraged over death sentence

Rawalpindi, Pakistan (CNA/EWTN News)—The Lahore High Court has rejected the appeal of Asia Bibi against her death sentence, passed by a lower court.

The ruling dismayed Christians and others in Pakistan.

Bishop Rufin Anthony of Islamabad-Rawalpindi said the decision was “heartbreaking.” Bibi, a Catholic, was convicted under Pakistan’s blasphemy laws in 2010. She allegedly made derogatory comments against Muhammad while arguing with a Muslim woman.

She has denied the allegations and says the case stems from an argument she had with a Muslim woman over the pop culture of Islam. The nation has blasphemy laws that impose strict punishment on those who desecrate the Qur’an or who defame or insult Muhammad.

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Italian Sister Makes History

The blog of Italy’s La Stampa newspaper, “Vatican Insiders,” has reported that the Holy See has made Sr. Mary Melone rector of the Pontifical University Antonianum. She thus becomes the first female to hold such a position. “She was the first woman to obtain a permanent position as a professor at the faculty of Theology of the Pontifical University Antonianum, the Roman university run by the Order of Friars Minor (i.e., Franciscans); she was the first woman to be appointed a dean, which is equivalent to the position of department head.”

“I don’t give much importance to these kinds of labels, female theology,” Sr. Melone said in an interview with L’Osservatore Romano, published on the occasion of her election as dean of theology. “Above all I don’t like comparisons, although I recognize that in the past there may have been a reason for making comparisons. Maybe there is one today, as well. I don’t know. More space definitely needs to be given to women. The reference to female theology does not really fit with my vision of things. All that exists is theology: theology as research, as a focus on mystery; as...
a reflection on this mystery. But [this is] precisely [why] this requires different sensitivities.

A woman’s approach to mystery, the way in which she reflects on this mystery which offers itself and reveals itself, is certainly different from that of a man. But they do not contrast.

Women cannot measure how much space they have in the church in comparison to men. We have a space of our own, which is neither smaller nor greater than the space men occupy. It is our space. Thinking we have to achieve what men have, will not get us anywhere. Of course, although the steps we take may be real, this does not mean the job is complete. A great deal more can be done but there is change, you can see it, feel it. I think that (my case aside) the election of a woman in a pontifical university is also proof of this. The body who elected me was made up entirely of men!

So the Church doesn’t need gender quotas? she was asked.

“No, it doesn’t need quotas, it needs collaboration. And collaboration needs to grow!”

Pope recognizes “heroic virtue” of 12-year-old boy

Vatican City (CNA)——Pope Francis has authorized the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints to declare as Servant of God Silvio Dissegna, a boy who died in his adolescence as “venerable.”

The move was announced November 7 during an audience with Angelo Cardinal Amato, head of the Causes for Saints congregation.

Born July 1, 1967, Moncalieri, Turin province, Italy, Dissegna was diagnosed with bone cancer in early 1978. According to the website dedicated to his cause, www.silviodissegna.org, he spent his illness in prayer and exhibited a strong devotion to the Rosary. He also offered his sufferings up for the Pope, missionaries, the conversion of sinners, and other intentions. He died September 24, 1979.

The recognition of Disegna as “venerable” is the second step in the process leading to canonization. In order to move to the next phase—beatification—there must be at least one verified miracle attributed to his intercession.

Usually a second verified miracle is needed for a person to be declared a saint, although the Pope may waive this requirement.

Can’t hear God if you’re self-absorbed, Pope warns

Vatican City (CNA/EWTN News)——Pope Francis cautioned Christians not to be too self-reliant, saying such an attitude can lead to a self-centered egoism that fears God and refuses to hear or accept His generosity.

“It is so difficult to listen to the voice of Jesus, the voice of God, when you believe that that the whole world revolves around you. There is no horizon, because you become your own horizon,” the Pope told Mass-goers in the Vatican’s St. Martha residence on November 4.

The Pontiff centered his reflections on the parable Jesus told in the day’s Gospel, taken from Luke, in which the master of a house prepares a feast and invites his friends, who refuse and give excuses as to why other things are more important.

While most people like being invited to dinner, there was something about this one that the guests didn’t like, the Pope observed, saying the three who gave their excuses in the Gospel passage are an example of many of us.

“While most people like being invited to dinner, there was something about this one that the guests didn’t like,” the Pope observed, saying that if the dinner had been a small gathering for business, everyone would have come.

“But what shocked them was the graciousness. Being one among the others, there…this form of egoism of being at the center of one’s little world. We think it’s better not to get involved. We feel safer in our sins, in our limitations, but [we] feel at home. Leaving our home to answer God’s invitation, go to God’s house, with others? No. I’m afraid,” Pope Francis said, observing how this is a fear all Christians have hidden deep inside.

Pope Francis concluded his homily by drawing attention to Jesus’ death on the cross, by which He paid for this banquet with His humiliation and suffering.

“And this is the great generosity. When we look at the crucifix, we should think of it as an invitation to the banquet. Yes, Lord, I am a sinner. I have many things, but I look at you and go to the banquet of the Father,” he said.

Rather than being afraid of God’s gratuitousness, he said, the Church is asking that we keep our hearts open and do our own part the best that we can so the Lord can prepare the banquet for us.

Pope: You make the Church “sick” if you don’t support your bishop

Vatican City (CNA/EWTN News)——During a November General Audience Pope Francis said a Church that does not foster communion with the bishop is unhealthy.

In his remarks to the crowds gathered last month in St. Peter’s Square, the Pope called on Christian communities to “nurture a sincere and profound communion” with the bishop, “starting with the priests and deacons.

“Those who refuse and give excuses as to why other things are more important.

There is no healthy Church if the faithful priests, deacons are not reminded around their bishop”, he said. “This Church not united around their bishop is a sick Church.”

“It is in the bishop that the relationship of each Church with the apostles is visible and with all the other communities,” he said, “united with their bishops and the Pope in the one Church of the Lord Jesus, which is our Holy Mother, the hierarchical Church.”

Turning to the reading of Paul to Titus read out during the audience, Pope Francis acknowledged it is “not easy” to practice the “many virtues” which St. Paul commends to bishops, “because we are sinners.”

He therefore asked for prayers that they “can at least hope to be closer to the things that the Apostle Paul advises for all bishops.

Of all the “ordained ministries” to which Christ gives rise “in order to build up the Christian community as His Body,” the Pope said, the ministry “of the bishop stands out.”

“Assisted by priests and deacons,” the Holy Father said, “it is Christ Himself Who is present” in the bishop, “and Who continues to take care of his Church, ensuring His protection and guidance.” In their “presence and ministry,” he added, “we can recognize the true face of the Church: She is our Holy Mother, the hierarchical Church.”

He explained “the Church exercises her motherhood” through her bishops, priests, and deacons, sustaining the faithful from baptism until death.

“This motherhood is “expressed in particular in the person of the bishop and in his ministry,” said the Pope.

“As Jesus chose the apostles and sent them out to preach the gospel and shepherd His flock,” he said, “so the bishops, their successors, are placed at the head of the Christian community as guarantor of their faith and as a living sign of the presence of the Lord among them.”

Pope Francis stressed that theirs “is not a position of prestige” or “an honorary role,” rather, it is one of service.

The Holy Father went on to say there is no place in the Church for a “worldly mentality,” in which the title of bishop is understood in the context of an “ecclesiastical career.” Rather, “being bishop means keeping ever present the example of Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, Who came not to be served but to serve (cf. Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45), and to give His life for His sheep (cf. John 10:11).”

As shown by the many bishops who have been declared saints, the Pope said, “one does not ask for” this ministry, “nor can it be bought.” Rather, it is accepted “in obedience, not in an attempt to climb higher but to lower oneself,” just as Jesus “bowed Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2.8).

“It is sad when we see a man who seeks this office and does all he can to get it, and when he gets it, he does not serve. Instead [he] goes around like a peacock and lives only for his vanity,” the Pope said.

Another “precious element” of the bishop’s ministry is their unity, Pope Francis said.

Just as the apostles were “united as one family” around Jesus, so too the “Bishops too are a single college, gathered around the Pope, who is the guardian and guarantor of this profound communion that was so dear to Jesus and His apostles themselves.”

The Holy Father noted the beauty of such collegiality expressed by the bishops, alongside the Pope, such as was recently witnessed in the Synod of the Family.

Pope: Every vocation—married or otherwise—begins with the family

Vatican City (CNA/EWTN)——In a meeting with members of the Italian Adult Catholic Scouting Movement, Pope Francis stressed the “educative mission” of the family, noting every vocation is rooted in this fundamental relationship.

Pope Francis acknowledged the “apostolic commitment” shown by the scout members, which testifies to the “virtues of loyalty, fraternity, and love of God and neighbor, generously serving the Church and civil community.”

“Noting how Italian scouts often use the term strada—or “way”—the Holy Father encouraged those present to follow their call to lead the way in the family, in creation, and in the city.

As the “primary place for education,” Pope Francis said, the family is the “community of love and life in which every person learns to relate to others and to the world.”

“All vocations make their first steps in the family,” the Pope continued. It is important for movements like the scouts to “reaffirm that education in the family constitutes first priority.”

The Pope said that for Christian parents, “the educative mission finds its specific source in the sacrament of marriage, for which the task of bringing up children constitutes a real ministry in the Church.”

Pope Francis concluded his address to the scouts by urging them to be “good missionary disciples of the Lord Jesus, diligently listening to His word, always having faith in Him Who never disappoints, swelling with Him in prayer, seeking to be living stones of the Church community.”
Whenever I’m in Mexico City (not as much as I’d like), I always make it a point to walk the neighborhood of Coyoacán. Pacing the tree-lined streets and past the brightly painted homes and walls feels like being propelled through a time warp. I find its effect intoxicating.

But partly it is because at the end of my paseo is the beautiful church of San Juan Bautista. Strolling through the utterly serene el Parque Centenario, it is hard to imagine the chaos and violence that took place here 80 years ago this month.

First some context. After Mexico gained its independence in 1824, Catholicism was made the nation’s sole religion. However following the 1857 revolution, the government became secular and grew ever more radically anti-Catholic.

Mexico saw another revolution in 1910-17, resulting in its 1917 Constitution. Influenced by the communism then sweeping the world, that document’s anti-clericalism was breathtaking. It allowed the government to confiscate churches and use them for any purpose. The government shut down parochial schools and arrested priests for celebrating the sacraments.

This persecution led to the Cristero War (aka la Crís-tiada, 1926-29), which was a revolt by the overwhelmingly Catholic population against the government.

One man who spoiled for such fight was Marxist activist Tomás Garrido. In 1928, Garrido persuaded the state of Tabasco’s governor to launch an anti-religious campaign. This was intended to “de-fanaticize” the people and completely eradicate their faith.

Eradicating religious beliefs became even more of an obsession for Garrido upon his becoming Tabasco’s governor. He forbid crosses on graves. He replaced religious holidays with fairs. Communities named after saints were renamed after heroes of the military, celebrating an already scheduled special Mass for children. He quickly put on her nicest dress of green silk with a white collar. She moved forward with children inside.

The Red Shirts however didn’t care and began marching on San Juan. Holding her arms out in the form of a cross, María stood before the main door blocking their path. Her friends grew afraid and called for her to step aside, but she stood her ground. As the priest finished the consecration, the riffraff grew more unmanageable. People began evacuating the church out the side and back doors as Father hurriedly consumed the holy species.

Now whipped into a frenzy, the Red Shirts shouted, “Death to priests!” “Damn Christ the King!” “Damn the Virgin of Guadalupe!” Witnesses say María had grown thoroughly pale with fear. Nonetheless she stood her ground and shouted back, “Viva Cristo Rey!” and “Viva la Virgen de Guadalupe!” Whenever a surge seemed imminent, she moved forward to meet it.

By now several others had joined her across the church’s entrance to block the antagonists’ way. One of the riffraffs, a former student of hers begged with tears in his eyes, “Miss Camacho, please leave.” She didn’t move.

Some of the Red Shirts raised their weapons and on the prearranged signal, “Viva la Revolución!” fired their guns. María fell while in the midst of saying, “Viva Cristo Rey!” fired their guns. When María dreamt she had to choose between dying for her faith and being happy. Her friends asked her what her response was in the dream, and she responded, “God would give the grace to be faithful to Him. And besides, if I had the misfortune to deny God, I should die of grief!”

By age 23, she was giving speeches exhorting Catholics to join her in the commitment to living out their faith. Naturally she wondered if she had a call to the religious life. While she discerned, she participated in apologetics, liturgical, and Bible studies.

In late December 1934, Garrido—now the federal secretary of Agriculture—sent the Red Shirts to Coyoacán to turn San Juan Bautista into cinders.

On hearing the commotion and discovering its cause, María quickly put on her nicest dress of green silk with a white collar. When her sister Lupe asked her why she was so well-dressed, María replied, “When it comes to defending Christ the King, it is appropriate to wear your best.”

Passing hecklers threatened death as she and Lupe made their way through the park. María retorted, “We are not afraid. We are willing to die for Christ the King and are glad for it.”

Despite the angry crowd outside, the priest began celebrating an already scheduled special Mass for children. He could not believe the hooligans would burn the church with children inside.

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Fr. Alejandro Torres arrived just in time to administer last rites before she expired. Four others died at the same time. Sadly the Catholic crowd rushed to judgment and attacked Ernesto Malda, a Red Shirt who had just arrived. An investigation later proved Carlos Madrazo had shot María.

Her funeral was tremendous in that it drew 30,000 people. Afterward, a march was organized to Mexico City’s Zócalo to demand government punishment against the culprits.

When arrests were made, “Garrido sent the murderers a case of Champagne in jail and declared that they were under his protection.”

**IN MEMORIAM**

Fr. Brendan Hanratty
December 1, 2000

Msgr. James E. Walsh
December 2, 1993

Fr. Francis Reali
December 3, 1971

Bishop John T. Steinbock
December 5, 2010

Fr. Joseph A. Otte, CPPS
December 20, 1989

Fr. Frank Miller
December 23, 1994

Msgr. George D. Monaghan
December 27, 2004

Fr. Edward Leahy, OCD
December 29, 1995

Msgr. William L. O’Connor
December 30, 1991
Young Woman’s Suicide Stimulates Prayer, Discussion

Brittany Maynard

Portland, Ore. (CNA/EWTN News)—“Goodbye, world. Spread good energy. Pay it forward!”

After typing this final Facebook message, Brittany Maynard, who became the poster child for assisted suicide, ended her life at home in Oregon surrounded by family.

Maynard's death came as a shock to many, since just two days prior, she released a video saying she was reconsidering the November 1 date she had set for her suicide.

However November 1 came, and Maynard took her life. The announcement came on November 2, All Souls Day, when the Catholic Church particularly prays for the souls of those who have died.

Janet Morana, executive director of the pro-life organization Priests for Life, said the first thing her office did Monday morning was to offer prayers for Brittanys soul.

While the Catholic Church teaches suicide is a grave sin, it also preaches a profound trust in God's mercy and recognizes only God can judge where an eternal soul will go. Catholics are called to pray, fast, and offer their own sufferings for the souls in purgatory.

Kara Tippets, a young wife and mother of four, also has terminal brain cancer. Before the suicide, she begged Brittany to consider the person of Christ and what the gospel might mean in the face of her suffering.

In an exclusive interview she told North Coast Catholic, “My heart is grieved by her decision, and I’m in prayer for her family. I am also asking my readers [of her blog Mor dane Faithfulness] to enter this important conversation with kindness.”

Aggie Catholics, a Texas A&M University student group, also called people to prayer.

“This is not a time for condemnation, but one of prayer. To pray for Brittany Maynard’s soul, family, and friends is an act of charity. To condemn her is not,” the group said.

Morana suggested the confusion among Catholics surrounding Maynard's decision should serve as a call for better catechesis at a parish level on end of life issues.

“I saw so many comments from Catholics saying, ‘It seems like the most merciful thing to do. She's dying anyway.’”

Morana said, “To me, that should be a big [red flag] to the bishops to say, you have to get your priests preaching this. We don’t judge people, but the bishops to say, you have to get your priests preaching about this topic.”

A Vatican official clarified that while we cannot judge a person, we can judge actions as right or wrong.

Spanish Bishop Ignacio Carrasco de Paula, president of the Pontifical Academy for Life at the Vatican, explained to ANSA news agency, “We don’t judge people, but the gesture in itself is to be condemned. What happened in her conscience we don’t know.”

Bishop Carrasco de Paula said Maynard decided to take her life “thinking she would die with dignity, but that is the error.”

He called this view “an absurdity” because “dignity is something incompatible with putting an end to your own life.”

“Committing suicide is not a good thing; it is bad because it’s saying ‘no’ to one's own life and to everything that means regarding our mission toward the people around us in this world.”

If someday “a law is passed allowing the sick to end their lives,” he said, “they would be left completely abandoned. This danger is imminent because society does not want to pay the costs of illness, and there is a risk that this outlook would become (seen as) the solution.”

Dr. Julie Masters teaches a course called Death and Dying at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She said when her class discusses physician-assisted suicide, she asks her students to consider whether it truly is a free choice.

“The question I posed to the students: Is this a choice, or is it an expectation?” she said.

With names like “Death with Dignity,” right-to-die laws appear to offer patients more dignity by giving them an out when it comes to intense and debilitating suffering. The idea of dignity, however, begs the question of what gives life value, Masters said.

“That’s the challenge of the concept of a slippery slope, and when you move to the position of physician assisted suicide, to euthanasia, who do you expect to end their lives because they no longer seem to be worthy or of value?” she said. “Then I think we have a huge problem because then we fail to see the value of life, the value of that life.”

As writer Lisa Miller wrote in a recent article for New York Magazine, the idea of dignity without the ugliness and suffering that usually accompanies death, is a fairly new idea, sprung from Western society and detached from the all-too-often reality of most people’s last moments.

“Jesus, bleeding, cried out in agony and loneliness on the cross, and the earliest Christians loved their martyrs burnt, starving, or torn apart, and chewed,” she wrote. “But in the secular West, dignity has come to mean a kind of existential modesty, a wish not to be seen at one’s worst, at a moment when one might not have the wherewithal to retrieve an appropriate fig leaf for the indecent business that is death.”

Miller speculates that this increasing acceptance of the idea of physician-assisted suicide stems from a desire to somehow “sanitize” death, which until recently had been understood to be a process naturally involving ugliness and suffering.

In her experience, Masters said, people who choose assisted suicide are responding out of fear, which could be helped if hospice and palliative care were made to be more viable options, especially in the long-term.

“It’s about fear. Be not afraid—365 times we are told,” she said, referring to the biblical phrase. "But people are afraid because they have examples in their mind of other people who have died a hard death, and it is helping them to see that death can be a gift, and it can be approached in a comforting way.”
When people think of Catholic Charities, service to the poor, the homeless, and the aged naturally come to mind. What many don’t know, though, is that we also offer legal services to immigrants and refugees.

Our staff of five Board of Immigration Appeals-accredited immigration representatives counsel and guide our clients through all immigration and resettlement processes including naturalization, obtaining legal residency, family reunification, assistance to victims of domestic violence, crime, and trafficking. We also provide refugees with guidance and services that enable them to become independent.

Sometimes it is heartbreaking work because the law is very specific, quotas are firm, and often many who want the opportunity to experience the American Dream have no legal avenue. That dream is the same for immigrants as it is for those of us lucky enough to have been born here. I believe it would be very difficult to find anyone in the world who would willingly give up familiarity, family ties, and cultural habits on a whim. These are not adventurers. They are mothers, fathers, and children who really deserve the right not to immigrate. However compelled by circumstances in their homelands, they travel long distances at great personal peril. Leaving behind all that is familiar, they desperately crave a better future for themselves and their families. Those who are successful are the most determined and persistent. We would be wise to welcome those who possess these traits and to allow them to contribute their talents to building a better America.

Our clients range from a 15-year-old girl who aspires to study mechanical engineering at Stanford to a developmentally disabled 19-year-old boy whose family is homeless, and a young father who, because he received permission to work legally, now has a job with Sonoma County with benefits and looks forward to buying a home for his family. We serve refugees from Iraq, Burma, Eritrea, and expect to be asked to help with Syrian and Afghan refugees. Refugees—people arriving from unstable areas—have it particularly hard. They wait years for the chance to relocate to America. They do not arrive with credit histories and verifiable work experience. Even if they have the financial resources, finding a community partner to accept them as tenants is difficult. Thus we currently only accept people who already have relatives in the area willing to house them. This situation puts the refugees in a very vulnerable position of dependence on the goodwill of a relative or acquaintance with whom they may not have a close relationship. We need a housing partner for these people. I joined CC as a volunteer in January 2012, working with the naturalization program and became permanent staff last October. I work primarily with DACA applicants (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), a program instituted by President Obama in response to the DREAM Act’s failure to pass Congress. We have helped over 350 DACA clients submit applications since the program began in late summer 2012 by using 10 volunteers. I have also served as the case worker for our refugee program since February 2014.

My days are often crazy. For instance, today I came into the office with a set schedule: One client appointment for a DACA renewal at 10:00, a consultation to qualify a young woman for her initial DACA application at 11:00, and then over to the Family Support Center to represent our legal department during a tour.

But as it goes in immigration, I ended up with a call from a Cuban father and son living with a relative in Vacaville. I have been helping them navigate the process of filing all of the different paperwork that it takes to establish themselves as asylum seekers. I then had a drop in visit from the mother and father of one of my refugee cases from Iraq. They still have one son in Turkey waiting to be accepted into the United Nations refugee program who was recently told his interview has been postponed for nine months. I will try to see if I can find out any information for them through our contacts in Washington, DC, at the USCCB.

Meanwhile, an Iraqi family of four that is staying in Petaluma with an uncle has been looking without success for affordable and available housing in Sonoma County. They asked me to check into relocation to Milwaukee, and I made a few phone calls on their behalf only to receive an email that they have changed their minds, and would I mind checking in Seattle?

Never dull, that’s for sure. But I believe it is within the ability of our faithful to help these folks if we could only spread the word.

Lynn Wilshire serves as an Immigration Services assistant with Catholic Charities of Santa Rosa.
Pope Blasts “Pagan” Christians Who Cause Scandal

Vatican City (CNA/EWTN News and NewsMax)—In a homily given during a daily Mass in early November, Pope Francis urged the faithful against living as lukewarm pagans, who are merely Christian in name, for these are “enemies of the Cross.”

Reflecting on the day’s reading from Paul to the Philippines, the Holy Father spoke of two types of Christians: those who advance in their faith and those who behave as “enemies of the Cross of Christ.”

Pope Francis condemned this latter group as “Christian pagans,” describing them as “worldly, Christian in name,” but living a “pagan life.” They are “pagans with two coats of Christian paint in order to appear as Christians.”

There are many Christians today who live out their faith in this way, the Holy Father said. He warned the faithful to be attentive so as to not become like these “Christian pagans” who are merely “Christians in appearance.”

The downfall of such Christians is their mediocrity, he continued, for their hearts become lukewarm. "Because you are lukewarm, I vomit you from My mouth" the Pope said, citing the Lord’s words against lukewarm Christians (cf. Rev 3:16).

“They are enemies of the Cross of Christ. They take the name (Christian), but do not follow the demands of a Christian life.”

Continuing his reflection on St. Paul, Pope Francis said these Christians “are citizens of the world,” not of heaven.

The Holy Father then challenged the faithful to ask themselves if they too exhibit the same worldliness and paganism and whether they are citizens of Heaven or the earth.

Unlike the citizens of heaven who await the coming of the Savior, Pope Francis said the citizens of earth are destined for damnation.

“Where will the citizenship you have in your heart take you?” the Pope said. Worldliness leads to ruin, whereas the cross of Christ leads to “to an encounter with Him.”

Pope Francis noted there are signs “in the heart” that show one is “drifting toward worldliness.” Among these are self-love, attachment to money, vanity, and pride.

On the contrary, if “you seek to love God, to serve others, if you are meek, if you are humble... you are on a good path. Your citizen card is good: It is of heaven!”

The Holy Father recalled how Jesus asked His Father to save His disciples “from the spirit of the world, from this worldliness, which leads to damnation.”

Pope Francis turned to the Gospel reading for the day, in which Jesus gives the parable of the rich man and the dishonest steward. The steward did not start cheating and stealing from his master overnight, the Holy Father said. Rather, he arrived at this level of corruption “little by little.”

“Thus is “the road to worldliness of these enemies of the cross of Christ,” he said. “It leads you to corruption!”

Pope Francis concluded by calling on Christians to remain “firm in the Lord,” as Paul says, for “there lies the transfiguration in glory.”

Hang Ten, Saintly Surfer Dude

Beatification cause opened for Brazil’s “Surfer Angel”

Rio de Janeiro (CNA)—The Congregation for the Causes of Saints at the Vatican has approved the cause of beatification of Guido Schaffer, who was a Brazilian seminarian known as the Anjo Surfista, or “Surfer Angel.”

The Archdiocese of Rio de Janeiro will now establish a tribunal to handle the cause. The archdiocese requested approval of the cause in May by sending the Vatican numerous documents on the life of Schaffer “to show that he lived in accord with the teachings of the Church.”

Schaffer died of drowning in May 2009, at the age of 34 while surfing at Barra da Tijuca in Rio de Janeiro.

His untimely death came just weeks before he was to be ordained to the priesthood.

Formation directors and seminarians at St. Joseph Seminary in Rio, where he studied theology, remember Schaffer with great fondness.

“He was very sensitive toward others and was a man of great faith and was passionate for the word of God,” said Fr. Roberto Lopes, episcopal vicar for the causes of saints in the archdiocese, last May.

“On the day of his burial, the Church of Our Lady of Copacabana was filled with bishops, priests, and many believers who saw [in] him a young man who was different and deeply loved God,” he added.

Schaffer left a major impact on the poor due to his work with the native tribes of Brazil alongside the Missionaries of Charity.

“He was the son of physicians, he was well-off economically, but he was not attached to material things,” Fr. Lopes said.

“He worked at the Holy Home of Mercy and wanted to live there once he was ordained a priest.”

Fr. Lopes said Schaffer’s life “inspires more and more young people to follow the way of holiness while continuing to do everything that young people do.”

He recalled that during World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro in 2013, many young people visited an expo on Schaffer’s life.

“The number of people who visited the expo was amazing and still today there are many who seeking information and attribute graces received to his intercession.” Fr. Lopes concluded. ❖
On Saturday evening, November 15, the usually dormant and quiet St. James Church in Petaluma was illuminated by light and shaken by the noise generated by teenagers at the diocese’s first ever exAlt event. Yes, you read that correctly; there were high school students... in a church... on a Saturday night!

Many used one word to describe the experience: Powerful! One attendee was St. Vincent de Paul High School senior Ryan, who observed the event “made me feel like I was part of something bigger.”

Much bigger. In fact, nearly 200 people had filled the small church well before Chico State University student and Newman center worship leader Jason Weinrich kicked off the evening by singing Catholic recording artist Matt Maher’s, “All the People Say ‘Amen.’”

People of all ages swayed to the contemporary Christian rock. Then the lights dimmed, and keynote speaker Brennen Cull boomed out a message of passionate love. A Sacramento youth minister, Brennen challenged the faithful with Revelations 3:16: “Because you are lukewarm, I will spit you out of my mouth. “ He encouraged everyone to not be lukewarm to experience a tremendous “nearness.”

Celeste Fernandez, coordinator of Youth Ministry for St. Peter Church in Cloverdale, said she felt as though the Holy Spirit had been exhaled “upon us.” St. James Youth Minister Nancy Brown noted a similar sentiment, saying “When the bishop passed by holding the monstrance, there was a profound spirit [of joy] stirring in my soul.”

Adoration, the praise music, and message all converged to create a powerful and passionate moment with Christ for many. One soul who left astounded at the impact of the evening, Norma, a St. James youth team leader, said that during the event, her seventh grade grandson “put his head on my shoulder and said he wished his parents could have heard the speaker. I love this event.”

Eucharistic adoration is one of many ways Christians can attempt an authentic, personal relationship with our Lord, and exAlt is merely one form of adoration. The next diocesan sponsored event takes place next March in Napa.

For some this isn’t soon enough.

Said Julie, a teenaged parishioner at St. James, “Do we really have to wait until March?”

## Dad Muscles

My daughter was a few months old when we had our first, knock-down, drag-outs, “I brought you into this world, and I can take you out,” test of wills. (Full disclosure: I’ve worked with teens for decades so I’m keenly aware of the uphill battle I’m facing.) All she wanted to do at 4am was scream, and all we wanted to do was sleep. Hence, The Showdown!

Yet this was no ordinary battle because this was my offspring’s will, pride, and determination versus my own. Ugh. I literally created this stubborn, tiny mess of myself.

While cradling the “apple-of-my-eye” and reminding myself of the ever-surmounting love I had for this new gift from God (not to mention how much I loved a restful wife), I realized: I’m exercising my DAD MUSCLES! God has bestowed upon me this unique gift of fatherhood and I will need to build up my strength. (See full disclosure above.)

What’s amazing about this unique strength is that as parents, our muscles grow a little every day as our child grows a little every day.

So, literally, THANK GOD we do not receive a new baby when they are 15 with all the teenage problems and hormones. We do not have to lug around 125 pounds from birth. God provides us what we can handle. We also must thank Him that unlike a hormonal 15-year-old who is tough to even like sometimes, we LOVE cutey lil babies that are so soft and smell like fresh baked cookies. You can’t help loving them... even if it is 4am. God knows exactly what He’s doing. The eight pound infant is completely dependent on us and we spend a lifetime experiencing new problems every day, and every day we will exercise our parenting muscle to comfort, scold, affirm, and love. After babies who scream all night will come cutting teeth and then walking, falling, potty training, middle school heart breaks and so on ... and our metaphorical muscles grow.

How beautiful. God has programmed the parent-child relationship so we may learn of His deep love for us, both through our screaming and our triumphs.

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**Youth Page Q & A**

**Q: Should I receive Communion on the tongue or in the hand?**

**My cut:** While the posture and procedure for proper receipt has changed through the centuries and still differs per country, here in the good-old US of A, reception either on the tongue or in the hand are acceptable. It’s the communicant’s choice. Whatever way someone receives, they bow before receiving (see quote below). If receiving in the hand, your hands should be one on top of the other to form a “throne.” Such a gesture accentuates our understanding of what we’re doing—receiving the true (that is, not symbolic) Body and Blood of Our Lord—which will help us avoid “going through the motions.” The most important way we receive, though, is through the heart. #heartforChrist

**Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone of San Francisco:** “The proper posture for receiving Communion is standing. This is to show the respect that is due the Most Blessed Sacrament (in our culture, standing up shows respect to someone of importance who enters the room). The bow before receiving Communion signifies the humility with which we must approach the Sacrament.”

**Catechism cut:** Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 1356-1401

**GIRM cut:** General Instruction of the Roman Missal nos. 160-161

**Church cut:** Dominicae Cenae (“The Mystery and Worship of the Eucharist”) by John Paul II, 1980.

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**Youth Page**

**Teens Exalt the Lord at xAlt Event**

by Stephen Morris

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**Youth Page**

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Catholics on Immigration: Lasting Reform Needed

Washington, DC (CNA/EWTN News)—President Barack Obama’s executive action on immigration was met with both praise and concern from Catholic groups, who emphasized that more must be done to find long-term solutions for a broken immigration system.

“I am happy that some temporary relief is being offered to help parents and children who right now are living in daily fear that their families will be broken up by arrests and deportations,” said Archbishop Jose H. Gomez of Los Angeles, the highest-ranking Hispanic bishop in the U.S.

However, he cautioned, “the relief is not permanent and the problems are still not fixed.”

In late November, President Obama announced he would stop the deportation of certain undocumented immigrant parents for up to three years, allowing them to work legally. Eligibility requirements include having lived in the United States for at least five years, having children who are US citizens or legal residents, passing a criminal background check, and agreeing to pay taxes.

Upwards of 4 million people will likely qualify for this measure, while thousands of others will benefit from other changes.

In addition, the President said he would increase border security resources and deport those who had illegally crossed the border recently. He said he would focus government enforcement resources on criminals and those who threaten security.

Archbishop Gomez welcomed the actions as pro-family but emphasized that much more must be done for immigrant families.

In a statement responding to the President’s announcement, Archbishop Gomez insisted “the President’s actions are no substitute for the comprehensive immigration reform our nation needs.”

The announcement of the executive order was met with criticism from members of the Republican Party, who said it was unconstitutional and would encourage continued illegal immigration, with negative social consequences.

CatholicVote.org, a group that works to promote Catholic principles in public life, voiced wariness about the precedent that could be set by the executive order.

“We support immigration reform but strongly oppose President Obama’s executive action announced last night,” the group said in an e-mail to its members.

It said if a President “may selectively enforce laws based on his or her political preferences (even policies we agree with)—our nation is in trouble.”

Acknowledging the obligation for Catholics to respect the human dignity of each person, Catholic Vote said the border situation illustrates a need for real reform.

“Administrations' decision will improve the lives of millions of immigrants who are already here building communities and supporting families,” the group said. “However, we need a permanent fix to the immigration system that can only be achieved through bipartisan Congressional action.”

Indian Catholics Find Inspiration in Two New Saints

Vatican City (CNA/EWTN News)—Pope Francis canonized two Indian Catholics on Sunday, November 23. Both were known for their deep spiritual life and their intercession in helping families.

Among other accomplishments, St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara founded the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, in 1836. It was the first Catholic religious order founded in India.

St. Kuriakose founded an order of religious sisters called the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel. This congregation also received a new saint, St. Euphrasia Eluvathingal during the canonization. St. Euphrasia, who died in 1952, served as the superior general for the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel for three years.

St. Euphrasia was “a real model” for the sisters of the congregation. Although she mostly stayed inside of the convent for 50 years, she attained the deep union with God implied in the phrase “be perfect as I am perfect.”

Known during her life as the “Praying Mother,” St. Euphrasia is frequently petitioned for problems with the family or fertility. Many childless couples who come to pray at the site of the blessed’s death end up having children afterward.

St. Kuriakose was a man similarly known for his efforts in building up family life, inspired by his special devotion to the Holy Family. He believed Catholic, Christian life is possible only if families are good.

Kuriakose gave parents concrete instructions on how to raise their children. He also instructed children about how to be obedient, devoted, and respectful to their parents. He offered a series of retreats for families, particularly in schools and poorhouses.

Born in 1805, St. Kuriakose founded the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate with the help of a few friends. He was known for his efforts in bridging a schism that happened after the First Vatican Council, during which an unauthorized bishop came to India’s Kerala province and ordained priests without the Pope’s approval.

When St.. Kuriakose saw what was happening, he fought against that wayward bishop for the unity of the church and his Catholic life. If the schism had not been eventually resolved in India, observers believe the whole Church in Kerala would have gone away from the Catholic Church by now.

Besides two Cardinals and several bishops, nearly 800 Indian priests concelebrated the canonization Mass, while an estimated 10,000 pilgrims came from all across India, primarily Kerala Province.